



toolbox

The Tupelo Model

From the case study *Hand in Hand: Community and Economic Development in Tupelo* by Vaughn Grisham and Rob Gurwitt.

The Tupelo model, illustrated by the figure below, outlines the successful building of an economically viable community with a broad base including all the human resources in the community. "Economic development . . . came about because community development - the ability of citizens to identify and work together on issues of common concern, their dedication to educating children and adults, their constant search for ways of providing each other with the resources and skills they need to help themselves both as individuals and as communities - made it possible" (p. 29).

Guiding Principles of the Tupelo Model

- Local people must address local problems.
- Each person should be treated as a resource. So the community development process begins with the development of people.
- The goal of community development is to help people help themselves.
- Meet the needs of the whole community by starting with its poorest members, not just as targets for top-down efforts but as full partners in helping design those efforts.
- Leadership is a prime ingredient, but community development cannot be achieved without organizations and structure.
- Community development must be done both locally and regionally if the full benefits are to be achieved
- Never turn the community development process over to any agency that does not involve the people of the community.
- Expenditures for community development are an investment - not a subsidy - and will return gains to the investors. So people with money have both the responsibility and an interest in investing in the development of their own community.



Before a community can build and/or attract economic development, it is critical to work developing its people. As Grisham and Gurwitt show, "people were not so much the answer to (Tupelo's) problems as they were the raw material from which an answer could be crafted . . . Developing the community — connecting its people and its institutions—lays a base for balanced and sustainable economic development." To build the kind of economic development that is good for a community, developing the community itself must be the first step.

