

Three-Phase ACE Approach

The ACE Program targets communities with populations ranging from 2,000 to 18,000 and provides technical resources and tools needed to help communities ensure long-term economic success through the following:

Leadership Development	Health and Human Services
Strategic Planning	Tourism
Comprehensive Planning	Economic Development
Commercial Business Development	Education Enhancement
Infrastructure Requirements	Recreation Opportunities
	Quality of Life

Phase 1: Assessment

During Phase I of the ACE program, the ACE Team comprised of experts from the list of topics above, visits the community to develop a comprehensive “report card” detailing community assets and recommending possible strategies. Prior to the visit, a self-assessment survey is sent to members of the local community to gather their impressions. The Assessment Visit also includes a public, open-forum community meeting where residents receive an overview explanation of the ACE process; the results of the self-assessment survey are presented; and stakeholders are asked to share their perspectives and opinions about the community with each other and with the ACE Team.

Based on the information and impressions received during the Assessment Visit, the ACE Team prepares an Assessment Report summarizing the Team’s findings and impressions and outlining several recommendations for the municipality’s consideration. This Assessment Report is presented to the community, typically at a City Council meeting. After receiving this Assessment Report, the municipality is invited to move into Phase II.

Phase 2: Leadership Development and Strategic Planning

With the guidance of a skilled ACE facilitator, the municipality develops a formal vision statement and strategic plan during Phase II that includes goal statements and strategies to achieve those goals, as well as action items for implementing the strategies. Although the planning horizon for a strategic plan is typically three to five years, the plan should be reviewed and updated at least annually. The ACE Team is available to advise each participating city’s strategic plan committee on selecting effective strategies and locating resources needed for implementing the plan.

Establishment of a formal, active leadership development program is a key requirement for communities during Phase II of the ACE program. If the city does not have a leadership program, the ACE Team will provide consultation and assistance to establish a leadership program that meets ACE standards. Leadership development programs are the key to building a core nucleus of citizens whose awareness of current issues, knowledge of the community, leadership skill sets and experience working with one another prepare them to step forward and assume leadership roles in the community. If the participating community has an existing leadership program, an ACE leadership specialist will determine if it meets the ACE standards. If the current leadership program does not fulfill ACE requirements, the leadership specialist will make recommendations that will enable the community to enhance the existing program to satisfy ACE requirements.

continued on next page

1 of 2



Phase 2: Leadership Development and Strategic Planning (continued)

Another aspect of Phase II is the designation or creation of a nonprofit development organization representing public and private interests that can seek funding community development initiatives. If the town does not already have a suitable nonprofit organization in place, ACE directs the town toward resources that can assist in the establishment of a nonprofit development organization. There are several advantages to having an organization that is deemed to be a tax-exempt charity under IRS code section 501(c)(3), including enabling contributions to be treated as tax deductible charitable donations.

Phase 3: Implementation and Comprehensive Planning

During Phase III, the community works on implementing the strategic plan that was developed during Phase II, and begins developing a comprehensive plan. While the strategic plan is relatively short-term, usually covering a three-to-five-year period, and is updated at least annually, a comprehensive plan provides a long-term guide for the community to develop its infrastructure and other community facilities, promote good design principles, and maximize its physical features and assets for future growth and development. The planning horizon for a comprehensive plan is typically 10 to 20 years, and is only updated every five years. The strategic plan and comprehensive plan should work together to help the community achieve its vision. To complete Phase III of the ACE program, the community should have in place both a planning process and a targeted implementation plan.

When an ACE candidate community completes the three Phases of the ACE program, it will be declared to be an Alabama Community of Excellence. Graduating communities are recognized in May of each year at the Alabama League of Municipalities Annual Meeting.