

***HOW TO BUILD A  
CHARACTER CITY***

***SIX VITAL PRINCIPLES FOR A  
SUCCESSFUL CHARACTER CITY INITIATIVE***

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

Every community in the world is unique. And yet we find ourselves dealing with the same basic issues that determine the success or failure of our community. Each one of these issues is rooted in character, either positive or negative. A city where positive character is upheld as the rule instead of the exception will find success in establishing positive roots, which will result in positive behavior on every level.

The following principles are designed as a guide to help you implement a Character City effort in your community. We recognize that there is no set mold into which a community can fit for any civic effort. However, we believe that you will be able to use these principles to forge a set of objectives that will make your Character City effort a success. Our only request is that you let us know how these principles affected your community for change.

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## ***PRINCIPLE 1: VISION***

Your motives for helping to launch a Character City initiative must spring from a desire to serve your city leaders and the community. Government leaders and community members can detect motives for personal gain or recognition. This will either turn them off to the Character City idea or cause them to reject it altogether. However, once a community leader thoroughly understands the Character City concept and wants to get it started, they will desire someone in the community to help champion the effort.

From its inception, the Character City concept has been designed as a vehicle to help government leaders be successful. The Character City model is a tool to accomplish this goal, but we must remember the goal and not focus primarily on the program. One of IACC's mottos is to "meet needs, not push programs." Therefore, our first goal in serving leaders through the Character City initiative are first of all to help them succeed in their role as models of good character. We also want them to take responsibility for the moral well being of the families and individuals under their jurisdiction by using their influence to encourage the character that will make these families and individuals successful in all of life. Finally, we want them to be able to solve the problems they face every day by targeting root causes through character training.

When a community leader desires to spearhead a character initiative in his or her community, it is vital that they already are not only involved in the community but that they are respected for their personal character. City officials and the community respect those who have gained a hearing through serving. It is through relationships built while serving the community in business, education, in the faith community, etc. that a community leader is able to gather those who are committed to character and get the rest excited about the Character City concept. A proven track record of community service will accomplish at least two things. First, you will have firsthand knowledge of the needs of your city, which you will later be able to address through the character initiative. Second, you have a chance to earn respect and speak with authority about this firsthand experience.

Once you have initial buy in from leaders in city government, you are then ready to share the vision with others who are sympathetic to the need for character. It is important that these individuals are also known for their good character. Together, you can begin to talk about the need for good character to be upheld in the community. You can also help to make the connection in people's minds between character and success in the problems they face every day. To do this, provide examples of cause and effect issues where a lack of character resulted in poor behavior. Because the flipside is also true, provide examples of positive character and how it was the root for good behavior. You can find these examples in history, in nature, and in current events. Once you have support and understanding from both community leaders and leaders in city government, you are ready to move forward with a more directed focus for your character initiative.

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## ***PRINCIPLE 2: ESTABLISHMENT***

For a community wide initiative of any kind to be successful, representatives from every sector of the community must support it. Form a local committee of concerned community leaders to serve as a group of community “champions” for character development. This steering committee can then work to form a non-profit organization and choose an appropriate name (e.g., The Character City Coalition, Augusta, GA, The Character Council of Greater Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky, The Terre Haute (IN) Alliance for Character, etc.).

As you move forward, it may be helpful to create a logo, letterhead, and other corporate identity items for your non-profit organization. As you grow, you may need office space and full-time employees. Several local coalitions have experienced this need.

As their local efforts have expanded, some local coalitions have assisted in starting Character Cities throughout their state (e.g. Character Council of Indiana, Character Builders, Inc. in Arkansas, Character Resources of Michigan, etc.). In fact, the Character Council of Indiana is designing a letterhead template with a consistent look for the local character coalitions in Indiana. This provides a level of continuity for the communities in which they are working. This continuity is important because it eliminates the need to “recreate the wheel” every time a new character initiative begins. The resources are already developed and available.

Once your local coalition is in place, lay out an action plan for your community. Define your mission statement and the objectives to support this mission. Next, lay out the strategies and tactics to accomplish these objectives. The IACC office is available for phone consultation to help in this process. We may also direct you to another local coalition elsewhere in the United States that has similar geographic and sociological dynamics. They will be able to answer more specific questions.

Set target dates for specific events (i.e. promotional, trainings, implementation meetings, etc.) and assign coalition members to chair subcommittees for each city sector. These include but are not limited to city government, business, education, faith, and media (Please see “Local Sub-committee Responsibilities”). Both your coalition and it’s subcommittees should hold regular meetings of the coalition to share what has been accomplished and continue setting practical objectives to meet the coalition’s previously articulated goals (Mission Statement, Objectives, Strategies & Tactics.).

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### ***PRINCIPLE 3: PROMOTION***

Your Character City initiative may well live or die based on its promotion efforts. But if you have a well-developed set of objectives, than it will not be difficult to enlist the support of the right people.

Set up meeting with potential financial sponsors. Explain the coalition's vision and goals and how the potential sponsor can be involved. Ask for their support in the form of a cash donation to your non-profit organization or by simply implementing a character initiative in their organization. Keep in mind that, when asking for financial support it is important to have specific projects for which those finances will be tasked. Possible projects include the sponsorship of promotional events; training for city government employees or police and fire personal; character materials for schools; airtime on local media outlets; distribution of the Character Family Book to families in the community; etc. Again, your set of objectives will determine the projects for which you will need support.

Next, begin to gather additional supporters for the character initiative. Make an appointment with your local leaders and write letters to more distant officials seeking their support and endorsement of the local coalition's efforts. Leaders to approach would include the state governor, federal congressman and senator, state representatives and senators, federal and state attorney generals, county commissioner, local judges, key business leaders, key faith community leaders, local celebrities of good character, etc. Ask them for a letter of support for the character-building efforts of the community, something you take to other community members in gathering their support. (See attached letter from Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee.)

The supporters that you have gathered play a significant roll in your community-wide "Character City Roll Out" event (e.g. luncheon, breakfast, press conference). Invite the entire community! Letters of invitation from key local leaders should accompany the invitation. At this event, you should include brief statements from 4 to 5 community leaders identifying the need for character and indicating their support for the initiative and an explanation of the coalitions' mission and objectives from the coalition chairperson. Incorporate testimonies of real-life community individuals who have implemented a character initiative and the positive results they have seen (e.g., local businessman; elementary class and their teacher with a CQ song or skit demonstration of character in the classroom; city resident whose life has been changed by character, etc.). Your keynote address should come from a local celebrity who is respected for good character. They can explain how character has been the critical ingredient in their personal success.

Your coalition chairperson will close this meeting with information about what each citizen can do to get involved with the Character City effort including how-to's for each community sector. Ask each attendee to fill out a response card at their table on which are the following options: request for further information; join the local character coalition; provide sponsorship; implement character training; etc (a sample response form is available from the IACC office.) Finally, announce upcoming character events (e.g., trainings for business leaders, in-service training for teachers, Character Family training classes, law enforcement training, non-denominational conference for church leaders, etc.).

Additionally, you may want to identify the TV and radio stations that will be featuring character each month.

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## ***PRINCIPLE 4: IMPLEMENTATION***

If your foundation is firm and your promotional efforts are effective, then the implementation stage will simply be a logistical event. Your coalition will provide the training and resources for each sector in the community as they begin to emphasize, require, and recognized positive character.

Assigned members of your coalition should set up more specific meetings with top leader of an organization and to further explain the program and give specifics on how his/her organization can be involved. It may be wise to go with the top leader to the governing body of the organization and make a joint presentation to them. Ask the governing body for a leadership commitment to a character emphasis and a budget decision for character implementation. This should include a commitment by the members of the governing body to model good character personally (using the 49 character qualities as a guide) attached to a written budget decision and organizational direction to establish the character-training program in their organization (per the appropriate organizational partnership agreement). This commitment should also include an expression of their organization's support for the character-building efforts underway in their community.

Specific implementation of the organizations' character program could begin with a pilot program in one department, or could be organization-wide from the start. The local coalition can establish ongoing communication and involvement between CTI (or a local CTI representative) and the "Character Organization." This will ensure that the character initiative maintains momentum after the initial euphoria wears off.

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## ***PRINCIPLE 5: PERPETUATION***

As you begin this ongoing establishment of a “culture of character” within the city by numerous efforts to help families build character in their lives, you can begin to develop a new purpose as a community. The community now measures their success not by the programs that have been implemented but by the lives that have been changed. The ultimate measure of success is when the city gains a reputation of a community committed to and promoting good character by its emphasis, requirement, and recognition.

As your “culture of character” begins to reap the anticipated benefits, provide opportunities for you mayor to actively share what has happened with other communities around your state. Some of the key concepts these ideas to remember when talking about building a City of Character are:

- Character is vital for success in all areas of life.
- Character development must begin with a commitment by city leadership to model good character.
- The Character City effort must be practical and action-oriented.
- The Character City effort must relate character to all areas of our lives. Focus on changing mindsets through training in character-based principles.
- The Character City effort must be locally organized and driven. It’s not a program implemented by a national organization, but rather a result of the combined efforts of concerned local officials and community leaders who are taking a proactive approach to resolve the problems being faced by communities today.
- The Character City effort must be family oriented. The goal is to create a culture of character where families can be successful.