Volunteer

Guide Book

Minnesota Design Team

AIA Minnesota

A Typical MDT Weekend Visit Itinerary:

Thursday

7:00 pm - 9:00 pm	MDT team arrives at the reception to meet their host families

Friday

8:00 am - 8:30 am	Light breakfast provided to the MDT team
8:30 am - 11:30 am	Community presentations to the MDT team meant to further orientate team members with the community. Topics might include city governance and relationship with surrounding communities, schools, community and religious organizations, housing types, local businesses, economic development, environmental issues, transportation issues, etc.
12:00 pm - 1:30 pm	MDT team members are pre-assigned in pairs to have lunch with a community member at different local establishments
1:30 pm - 3:00 pm	MDT team is led on tour of the community. May include walking, bus, and/or boat
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm	MDT team meeting
5:30 pm - 6:30 pm	Community potluck dinner
6:30 pm - 8:00 pm	Community Town Meeting facilitated by MDT. Purpose is to help community members to itemize and prioritize the community's needs
8:00 pm - 9:00 pm	MDT team debriefing

Saturday

8:00 am - 8:30 am	Light breakfast provided to MDT
8:30 am - 6:00 pm	MDT team work session. Lunch and dinner provided to team members as they find time
6:30 pm - 8:00 pm	MDT team makes presentation to the community (100 - 200 community members expected)
8:00 pm - 8:30 pm	Community Q & A with MDT team members
8:30 pm - 9:00 pm	MDT team debriefing

Sunday

8:30 am - 9:30 am	Optional breakfast with Coordinating Committee and MDT team members.

Before the Weekend

Most of the time, you will be receiving two packets of information in advance of the visit. The first packet should include a copy of the pertinent pages of the community's application, a copy of our participation policy and information about the pre-visit meeting. By the time you receive the first packet, you have most likely already filled out the team member profile, found on our website; but if not, you should do so.

Several weeks prior to the visit, the co-leaders will give the community a profile on each team member. The profiles serve two purposes: they introduce the team member to the host family and they alert the community and the host family to such issues as food preferences (such as vegetarian meals) and allergies.

The pre-visit meeting is held approximately one to two weeks prior to the visit. It is an opportunity for team members to meet each other and to begin to think collectively about the community's issues. This is also the time at which car-pools will be established. (Since mileage is reimbursed and funds are limited, driving alone is strongly discouraged.) Ideally, the second packet of information will have been received already; but if not, then it will be handed out at this meeting. It should include:

Information the community has gathered in working on the "Four Environments," the written survey responses, a copy of the weekend schedule with times and locations, a map of the Thursday evening meeting location, a copy of the team member reimbursement form and a current team member list.

While this is a completely volunteer event, we are volunteering as professionals – please dress in appropriate attire – business casual is preferred. The visit constitutes a very busy, very focused 2½ days. If it is to be productive, and all parts of it are to run smoothly, team members must be organized. Before the weekend even starts, team members should be thinking, what will my board say?

Thursday Evening — Arrival

Team members arrive in the community, not always at the same time, but usually around 6:00 pm-ish. On your approach into town for the first time, take notice of your surroundings. What is first your impression of community? What were you greeted by; could it be improved upon? Many communities have a casual reception where team members meet and visit informally with their host families in a relaxed group setting. MDT Team members are introduced to Community Team Leaders and visa-versa. You may receive a packet of information, including items such as schedule of Friday morning presentations and names of presenters, with time allotments. The packets may also include handouts on the key points of the Friday morning presentations (serving two purposes: they help presenters organize their thoughts and they help team members take notes). The community may choose to plan the arrival reception in a special place the team members might not otherwise get to see. Snacks may be provided.

Host families provide Design Team members with a place to stay on Thursday, Friday and sometimes Saturday nights, and may also offer other services, such as transportation. Host families are important one-to-one links between the community and the Design Team; they often provide insights and nuances into community issues that, often, are not gleaned from the more organized events of the visit. Thursday night is a good time to chat with your host family one-on-one to get the inside scoop.

Friday Morning —Community Presentations

This is the time for the Design Team to hear about the community. The morning is divided into approximately 6 to 10 presentations that could include most, if not all, of the following:

> Information about the community — demographics, economy (including both commerce and industry), natural features, cultural features, geography and history. Maybe some of the information unearthed in preparing the Four Environments. Maybe some of the issues included in the SWOT analysis. Students also provide valuable insights. If there is a community issue that involves other government agencies (such as the county highway department, for example), then representatives from these agencies should also make a presentation.

If handouts were not included in the packets received at the Thursday evening arrival meeting, they will be handed out at this time. The presentations should be short enough that there is time for a brief Q&A at the end of each one.

In the words of one team member: "The Design Team comes into a community and, theoretically, steps onto a moving train. The Friday morning session gives the team a quick introduction to the community — where the 'train' has been and where it seems to be headed." Again, as the speakers talk, be thinking about how our boards might address the issues they are raising. Beverages, such as coffee, tea, water and/ or juices, as well as snacks such as rolls, muffins and fruit may be served.

Friday Noon — Lunch

Friday lunch is sandwiched between the morning presentations and the afternoon bus tour. We break out into different groups which have typically been pre-assigned. People from the community prepare and serve the meal and members of the community share the meal with the team members. Lunch serves a couple of purposes:

- Time for team members and community residents to talk with one another in an informal setting, so that team members can understand the community better.
- Time for a focused discussion. Typical topics can include the community's history or a particular situation in the community, such as business in a tourist town, senior citizens or students, preservation in a town with many historic buildings.

Typical areas of focus for these lunches are schools, where team members eat with students, senior centers, or business groups/developers.

Friday Afternoon – Community Tour

People from the community take team members on a tour to acquaint us with important sites and characteristics of the town. This usually includes a bus tour of the larger community and, often a walking tour of the downtown area. Possible tour sites include historic buildings, main street, existing and potential parks, other public places, natural resources, residential neighborhoods and major highways that do not run through the downtown area. Stops during the tour should include sites that were topics of the community presentation on Friday morning. Some team members choose to bring cameras with them, in case there is a particular characteristic – such as a view or building style - that they want to be able to refer back to on Saturday.

Friday Late Afternoon — Team Meeting

We meet as a group, without people from the community, to discuss what we have heard and seen all day. We also formulate the questions we want to ask at Friday evening's town meeting. Our main goals are to seek additional information from the community at large and to test our preliminary conclusions. It is important to look for unstated meanings, as well as nuances, in what the community has said and what the team has seen. It is good to start off with a softball question, it's helpful to keep the questions phrased to evoke positive answers, and obviously, yes or no questions are to be avoided. Example questions include:

- What are the greatest assets the community has to offer?
- Fast forward 20 years – what are the top three things you'd like to see different?
- Define _______
- What is the next step the community can take to build and sustain positive momentum?

Friday Evening — Community Potluck Dinner

The community potluck dinner is a way of building "people infrastructure." It will attract people to the town meeting and involve people who might not otherwise become involved. It is typically held in the same building, but not necessarily the same space, as the town meeting. This allows people to move easily from one event to the other and eliminates clean-up delays if both were in the same room. The community will provide a welcoming table for community members, with sign-in sheets, at the front entrance.

Friday Evening — Town Meeting/Dotmocracy Exercise

This is the time for the team to listen to, and talk with, the people who live in the community. It is also a time for residents to talk with each other about community issues. At the end of the exercise, described below, the sheets are posted on the walls for community members to review and, with "sticky dots," community members vote to identify the issues they think are most important. Hence the name.

The 3-by-5 card/sticky dot exercise
This exercise works because of anonymity.

This is how to do the exercise:

1. People are gathered in small groups of 6-10 people around a table. Make sure the groups are randomly assigned. If the crowd is relatively small, people could simply count off and then move to a numbered table. If the crowd is expected to be large, people could be given numbered name tags when they arrive.

2. There should be one, and preferably two, team members at each table.

3. Each person at the table is given one 3-by-5 card for <u>each</u> question.

4. One of the team leaders, speaking to the entire group, asks each question. People need only a minute, often less, to answer each question. Really. Too much time on each question means the answers are less candid and less authentic. Total time for all questions should be about 10 minutes.

5. When all questions have been answered, collect the cards, with all cards for the first question kept together, then for the second, third and fourth questions (if there is a fourth question).

6. Trade cards with another table. Don't make it obvious, but that won't be hard.

7. Distribute the cards to people at the table – each person gets one card for each question. No one at the table knows where who wrote card he/she is reading.

8. Use one sheet of flip chart paper for each question; put the question number and title at the top.

9. Spend about 10 minutes on each question during this part of the exercise. Going around the table, people read off the answers on the card that was distributed to them. Team members write down brief answers on flip chart paper. If several cards have the same answer, simply jot down tic marks. What is important is that everyone at the table talks about the answer on the card – agree or disagree; meaning of what the answer is; nuances, clarification. This is where anonymity benefits the process. People feel free to talk because they do not know who wrote the card they are holding; if they agree with the response on the card, they know there are others who think as they do, and if they disagree, they can speak up without concerns they will hurt someone else's feelings or offend someone.

10. After all questions have been read, recorded and briefly discussed, the flip chart papers are then taped to the walls (don't forget to use only masking tape and nothing else).

11. Each person at the table is then given <u>2 or 3 sticky dots, in 2 different colors, for each question</u>. The leader will then instruct them to go to any of the sheets taped to the wall and attach one color sticky dot to the most important answer/thought for each question, and the second color sticky dot on the second most important answer.

12. Invite everyone to go around the room to see what others have marked with sticky dots.

Sometimes discussion does not flow as freely as we might hope. Examples of questions to help keep people talking include: What do you think they meant? How does this answer make you feel? What percent of the community do you think would agree with this? Does the community have the capacity to make this change? If not, what does it need?

After the event is over and the public has left, the leaders from the community will have the task of taking all the flip chart papers down off the walls and logging the responses in preference order. This frees up Design Team members to huddle-up and de-brief about any new or interesting information heard during the table discussions.

Friday Night — Social Gathering

Team members socialize with people from the community and their host families at a local restaurant or tavern. This can be a way for team members to understand the community better and to become acquainted with residents in a relaxed atmosphere.

Saturday Morning/Afternoon — Team Work Session

Team members gather, usually at 8:00 am on Saturday morning to discuss their understanding of the community — gleaned from all of Friday's events, and review and discuss the results of the dotmocracy exercise as tallied and presented by the community leaders.

The facility where we meet should have a large flexible work space where several rooms are available, where numerous tables and chairs can be set up in a variety of arrangements and where there is sufficient wall space for hanging large sheets of paper. There will also be large-sized street maps, parcel base maps, aerial photos and blank pages, as well as suitcases full of supplies such as colored markers, felt tip pens, pencils, erasers, white out, rulers, tape, glue and tracing paper.

Each team leader - and the dynamics of each team – is different. Consequently, each Saturday work session will be slightly different as well. Typically, the day will proceed as follows: The team as a whole will brainstorm to identify the major topics and concepts; and identify the ways these topics can be addressed – geographically, functionally, and conceptually. Then, based on areas of expertise, the team will break out into small groups to focus on each topic and how they can be translated into boards. The small groups draw some bum-wad sketches for of projects and ideas. It is often helpful if the non-drawers are evenly dispersed amongst the small groups. The bum-wads are then presented to the group as a whole (usually during an early lunch) so everyone has a chance to see what others are working on and to exchange ideas for improvement. Around noon, we begin producing the final drawings for the presentation to the community on Saturday evening. There will be a designated area where final boards will be taken as they are finished. There they will be titled and photographed for the presentation. Team members whose boards are complete should either offer help to other team members (coloring) or begin brainstorming about their verbal presentation to the community. Once all the boards are finished, they are arranged in presentation order and numbered. If there is sufficient time, which rarely happens, an informal rehearsal of the presentation could be done to practice timing and transitions between topics and speakers. If time still permits an outline of the presentation could be made and a community leader could be asked to make and distribute copies, but if this happens, it probably means that not enough time was spent on the boards.

Leaders from the community will be available to us to run errands, retrieve special resource materials and answer questions. However, please speak with one of the MDT leaders first about your needs. People will bring us food (breakfast, lunch and dinner) throughout the day. Other resources that will be available to us include:

- Overhead projector
- Access to computer, scanner & printer
- Access to a copy machine (one that enlarges, if possible)
- A book of sample boards from other cities (incase graphic inspiration is needed).

The presentation drawings are the marriage of the community's shared vision, issues and concerns, and Design Team expertise. They are the "road map" to be used by the community to implement its vision.

Saturday Evening — Community Gathering/Design Team Presentation

Everyone in the community is invited as the Design Team presents and explains the drawings, which represent its ideas for tackling the design, planning and development issues suggested by the community. A question-and-answer session follows the presentation. Since the presentation drawings are the only tangible product of the visit, the presentation should be video-taped.

Present broad concepts first, and then design details. Prepare in advance two or three explanations of how the board reflects the community's vision or where the inspiration for the project ideas came from. Here are some presentation tips:

a. Speak clearly. Good diction is critical.

b. Speak relatively slowly. Remember that, while team members know design and understand the concepts and rationale inherent in each of the boards, community people do not. They will catch on quickly, though, if you speak slowly enough so they can absorb what you are saying.

c. Speak loudly enough so that you can be heard. Some rooms are cavernous and, while they are good for basketball games, they are not particularly good for presentations.

d. Avoid design jargon. Avoid design jargon. Avoid design jargon.

e. Be conscious of sight lines from the audience.

f. Typically one person presents each section and each section may be comprised of several boards. Sometimes there is one speaker per board and every team member presents.

g. Be aware of who will be next in the presentation, so a team member ends his/her part by introducing the next team member.

h. The presentation of each board should be 5 minutes – no longer. (For example, if someone is presenting a group three boards, he/she is speaking for 15 minutes.)

After the formal presentation, the drawings are tacked to the walls so community members can study them more closely and talk with team members informally about them. Communities should have sign-up sheets or sign-up cards at the meeting, so residents can immediately indicate their interest in working on a particular project. Try to refer residents to it.

After the public has left, team members will send a few minutes talking about the presentation. What could have been better? What were our observations about the community's understanding of the concepts presented?

At this point the weekend is over. You're welcome to head home if you desire. Please don't forget to send a thank-you note to your host family (or leave one behind). Also, don't forget to fill out the reimbursement from for mileage if you drove.

Saturday Night — Social Gathering

Informal socializing, again at a local restaurant or tavern. Everyone in the community who has worked on the visit and team members alike will welcome a time to unwind and to talk about the visit.

Sunday Morning — Optional Breakfast

A chance for community leaders and team members to gather informally one last time and say goodbyes.

General Board Categories

- Introductory and context-setting boards.
    1. The community development process; or, the history of its development and "where we are today."
    2. An overview of a new vision; or, the community sees the physical setting in a new way. There are several ways to get at this concept; examples are:
        a. current land use (and/or zoning) and how that can change
        b. the place of the town in the region and the relationship between the two
        c. the boundaries, centers and edges that define a community and the shape of its future; how those boundaries, centers and edges can change (boundaries, centers and edges are emotional and historic, as well as geographic)

- Design issue boards. These boards can be used to illustrate how disparate elements can work together as a more powerful system.
    1. Downtown.
    2. Streetscapes.
    3. Store front renewal and recovery.
    4. Historic building renovation and adaptive reuse.
    5. Debunking the myth that there is not enough parking.
    6. Untangling circulation issues and conflicts.
    7. Debunking the myth of the suburban development pattern in neighborhoods (or, providing an alternative to cul-de-sacs, snout garages, no sidewalks and wide streets).

- Public spaces
    1. Inventory of all public spaces (city hall, parks, community centers, etc.); label them functionally and describe their purpose.
    2. Identifying public spaces that are missing.
    3. Depict how all public spaces can work together as a system.
    4. Relate public spaces to other features of the town (downtown and the neighborhoods).

- The highway and/or other new development nodes
    1. Appropriate design for development nodes; show clear identities for these nodes and how they can relate to each other and to the whole community.
    2. Depicting how different developments help, or hinder, each other (highway vs. downtown, for example).
    3. Managing peripheral development, to define the town geographically and emotionally.

- The unique or "crisis" issue, or the site constraint/natural feature issue. At the very least, point out that dealing with the issue is important for proper planning and for a healthy community process. Describe how the community's shared vision can set priorities, deal with previous choices and help resolve the issue. Deal with the issue as specifically as possible. Tie these boards to others in the presentation and demonstrate the connection between the unique issue and other issues.

- Process and next-steps boards
  1. Defining good leadership and process; suggest ways to use existing leadership and process and/or to strengthen them.
  2. Identifying new roles and responsibilities, so the community can respond to the visit.
  3. Laying out short, middle and long term projects and describe the different demands of each.

General Board Guidelines

- Remember that community people need (and want) to look at the boards a week, a month, a year and several years after the visit. They must understand clearly what the boards are "saying." Team members must fight against the natural tendency to assume everyone learns visually. Designers often assume everyone "reads" plans and images as easily as we do. This is not true. While images are attractive and compelling, most people receive conceptual information by reading rather than by looking. Therefore, it is important to use words to support each image. If you're not sure what to say, find someone to brainstorm with.

- Each board, as a standalone, must communicate.

- There must be cohesion between the boards. All boards must fit together, or the community will be confused and the visit will likely be for naught. Team leaders will monitor the design process as it develops throughout the work session and suggest ways to coordinate themes/images/ideas among the various groups so as to create a unified presentation. Coordination of the images and ideas is probably the most challenging aspect of the Saturday work session.

- <u>One</u> person will do the titles at the end of the work session. That person should be designated early enough in the afternoon so he/she can plan accordingly.

- While "non-drawers" may need a bit more guidance and encouragement, they are not excused from preparing boards. Everyone can color. Ask a team member who is skilled in graphics layout to help you develop your idea.

- Always pencil lines as guides for the placement of text. Nothing looks worse than sloppy text.

- Don't forget: erasers and white-out exist.

Specific Board Guidelines

<u>Drawings</u>

- Drawings <u>must</u> be clear and large enough, at a readable scale, to be easily understandable from a distance. This is the most important concept that designers must remember.

- The team <u>must</u> identify which images have priority in terms of importance to the community.

- Drawings should be relatively consistent in coloring, especially within one design group. For example, the "downtown streetscape" group should determine what color the pavers will be and then make sure that everyone uses that color when depicting pavers. This makes it easier for the community to understand the images from one board to another.

- Additional vignette images can be added later as time permits.

- Include perspectives as part of the mix of boards. Perspectives communicate some concepts far better than plan views. Each team should have at least one perspective drawer.

Text

- Boards must have explanatory text with the drawings. Without explanatory text, people will forget what was said about the images during the presentation. Also, people will be able to decipher a drawing far more easily if there is a caption they can read.

- Explain everything on the board. Team members must remember they will not be present to explain anything when the boards are put up for a city council meeting or community meeting.

- **Avoid all design jargon.** Said another way, use simple wording that can be easily understood by those living in small towns in outstate Minnesota who are not designers. (If a community member is "hanging around" the work session, you could simply ask if the words on the board make sense.)

- Standard upper-case lettering is best. Lettering should be legible. If you don't have neat handwriting, find someone who does. It should be large enough to read easily. (Do not use tiny printing, which causes eyestrain. Text that is too small is counter-productive because people get frustrated trying to read it and eventually give up).

- For text on boards with drawings, use dark colors (black or dark blues/browns/purples) so the text will stand out against the drawing.

Color

- For all boards, but particularly for process or text-only boards, it is encouraged to use color. Color in boards can communicate the organization of the board(s); it can emphasize the content, with the intensity of the content matched by the intensity of the color. Color can distinguish different sections of the text and create a visual hierarchy.

- Accent with bright colors like red, orange, green or blue (yellow tends to disappear into the page, so it is a poor choice for text).

- All this being said, doo not use color arbitrarily.

Titles

- One person will letter the titles and numbers on the boards. The titles must be consistent in appearance. (Boards should be numbered so the community remembers the presentation sequence.)

- Simple titles are best (i.e., "Trails and Parks" rather than "Recreational Opportunities").

- Avoid all design jargon.

Thank you for your interest … we hope to have the opportunity to get to know you on a visit in the near future!