

CREATING A VISION FOR PARADISE



MAUI ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Known as a Hawaiian paradise, Maui County grapples with economic and social challenges, which often go unaddressed by residents who feel they have little control over their islands. The Maui Economic Development Board sought to ensure that a vision for the four-island county would reflect resident concerns; Fern Tiger Associates was asked to design a process to broaden civic participation.

Though 2,300 miles from Maui, FTA knew Maui well from prior work. To reach the islands' diverse populations, FTA created *Focus Maui Nui*, a process of facilitated, interactive small group sessions. Groups developed "messages" for opinion leaders and "voted" on priorities. The sessions were designed to be held anywhere, with any group – in homes, at work sites, in classrooms, on beaches.

FTA helped promote the process using traditional media as well as innovative grassroots outreach, such as door-to-door canvassing, where elected officials "spread the word." "Legislators and city council members are campaigning door-to-door, but it's not election season," noted one TV news station's teaser. FTA also trained 65 community-based leaders to recruit their constituents – Head Start parents, the homeless, seniors, youth, and others – to ensure participation from traditionally-underrepresented groups. Roughly 1,700 people participated in 165 sessions, which became the basis for the county's General Plan, economic development strategy, and "vision" for the next decade.

Though 92% of Maui County residents live on the island of Maui, inclusion of residents from Molokai and Lanai was critical, especially for a visioning project that emphasized consensus. The project's name and tagline incorporated the notion of Maui Nui (Native Hawaiian for "greater Maui"), and government officials went door-to-door to recruit participants on all three islands. In the end, Lanai and Molokai made up 13% of all participants.



The 22-year-old MAUI ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD (MEDB), a public/private partnership that seeks to create quality jobs in Maui County, has worked with FTA since 1996 on projects including a strategic plan, an economic literacy initiative, and an economic summit.



WALKING THE WALK, PLANNING THE PLAN



WALKSTORY PLANSTORY

It was 2006 and the County of Maui was beginning to develop its General Plan 2030. County planners were considering ways to ensure that community values would drive the development of the Maui Island Plan, the first of three area plans (one for each of the three populated islands that comprise the County). Realizing that just three years earlier the groundwork had been laid when more than 1,700 residents actively participated in a visioning process called *Focus Maui Nui*, County planners contacted Maui Economic Development Board (MEDB) and Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) – who together had developed and implemented *Focus Maui Nui* – to create a participatory process that would simultaneously build on *Focus Maui Nui's* community-based vision and its commitment to authentic public engagement and education.

From 2002 to 2004, FTA worked with MEDB to design, develop, and implement *Focus Maui Nui* – a public engagement process that reached out to the full spectrum of communities in Maui in an effort to build a unified vision for Maui County and to boost civic participation in an area with woefully low election turnout.

Now, just a few years later, County planners wanted to leverage and build upon the success of *Focus Maui Nui* to chart the future with recommendations on zoning, land use, and infrastructure, so they asked the FTA/

PROJECT DATE: 2006

SECTOR: *Land Use, Planning*

FTA SKILLS AND SERVICES:
Community Engagement, Public Education, Outreach, Public Meeting Design and Development (including Facilitator Training, Materials Creation, Participatory Exercises)

The County of Maui comprises four islands, three of which are inhabited: Maui, Moloka'i and Lana'i. The County is home to more than 150,000 residents, the majority of whom reside on Maui island.

WALKSTORY PLANSTORY

MEDB team to create a series of activities and events that would engage the community in thinking about actionable priorities for the Maui Island portion of the Plan (in the hopes that this process could serve as a model for participation on the other islands at a later date). Steadfast in an attempt to reach the broadest audience possible and to maximize participation, *WalkStory* (and later *PlanStory*), as the process would come to be known, was publicized broadly.

The sessions were held on consecutive days and nights at public locations throughout the County, in an effort to attract residents from different parts of the island. Once at the session, participants worked in small groups on exercises designed to solicit as many ideas and opinions as possible, within a structured and facilitated format that could provide data-driven information to help County planners tasked with producing a value-driven general plan. The activities were guided by *Focus Maui Nui* “values” and “strategies:” improve education; protect and preserve the natural environment; address infrastructure challenges (especially transportation and housing); strengthen the economy; preserve local culture and traditions; and address human needs.

The first series of sessions, *WalkStory*, encouraged participants to consider how *Focus Maui Nui*’s vision and strategies could drive land use decisions. Upon entry, participants received a “passport” and were encouraged to visit each “location” within the session.



WALKSTORY PLANSTORY

Participants rotated between five stations: at each they were exposed to an exercise focused on one of the core community values of *Focus Maui Nui*. Participants spent 20 minutes at each station before moving to the next. Each presented a different and creative format to give and also to gain information about participant concerns, opinions, and ideas.

Based on the success of *WalkStory*, the Planning Department engaged Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) to design a follow-up event. *PlanStory*, as the follow-up came to be called, offered a second opportunity for residents to take part in discussions of more specific land use issues that would be encompassed in the Plan.

While it was hoped that many who participated in *WalkStory* would attend this event, *PlanStory* was designed as a stand alone process, so that residents could participate fully – regardless of whether or not they had attended *WalkStory*. Like *WalkStory*, *PlanStory* provided residents a chance to better understand growth and development issues. Also like *WalkStory*, it was structured as a facilitated engagement process to reflect community values; provide input into growth issues facing the island; discuss options for development, settlement patterns, infrastructure, and protected lands; better understand housing density; and share ideas and opinions.

In Hawai'i, people communicate informally through what is referred to as TalkStory – where someone talks to someone else, and then they continue the conversation with someone that they talk to later – telling the story and gaining new perspectives, which they bring to the next conversation. Picking up on this tradition, WalkStory and PlanStory were named to emphasize the importance of each resident's input, the value of listening, and the goal of using authentic dialogue to inform the County General Plan.

The Maui Island Plan establishes urban and rural growth areas that indicate where development will be supported. These growth areas are intended to bring about a reduction in commuting; protect community character; and preserve agriculture, open space, and cultural and natural resources.

WALKSTORY PLANSTORY

Participants worked in small groups – focused on a large map of Maui, which depicted topography, protected lands, and infrastructure. Their task was to concentrate on the development of the island, including decisions about areas to protect, siting of 16,000 new housing units (with decisions about density and location), and the need and placement of related roads and infrastructure.

FTA's analysis of community desires charted the results of the process. Both *WalkStory* and *PlanStory* utilized creatively-developed participatory tools and uniquely-facilitated activities. The report laid the foundation for the County's 2030 General Plan.

Because WalkStory and PlanStory were held in the evenings and weekends (to enable the largest number of people to attend), local food was available at all sessions free of charge to all participants. Some felt this gesture showed both respect for people's time and attracted some people who might not have come otherwise.