

AIA Design Assistance Team (DAT) Phases

Phase 1: Getting Started

The first phase of the DAT process introduces the community to the program. One person should not do all the work. The DAT process is inclusive, and this is the time to begin making connections within the community that will provide the support needed to sustain the entire four-phase process.

1. Establish a steering committee- The steering committee is made up of a variety of local people who have made a commitment to the DAT process—community leaders who can get things done. Committee members might come from the chamber of commerce, Main Street programs, municipal planning and development office, downtown associations, public-private partnerships, nonprofit community development corporations, developers, banks, local businesses, professional firms or organizations, and community groups. The committee must be large enough to get the work done. The size and structure of the steering committee depend on the needs and resources of the community. The first—and ongoing—task of the steering committee is to stimulate enthusiasm and support for the program in the community. Interest must be solicited from all corners— from banks to city hall, from neighborhood groups to the media. Through conversations with community stakeholders, the committee will gain greater understanding of local problems and begin to see the potential in bringing together diverse groups in the community.

Phase 2: Getting Organized

The second phase of the DAT process is critical to preparing the community for the DAT event. This is when resources are gathered that will be crucial to the team's understanding of your community and thus to its ability to work effectively.

Use this time to generate excitement about the process and encourage broad community participation—the keys to ensuring a positive future for your community.

1. Expanding the steering committee- The steering committee will create continuity and inclusiveness throughout the DAT process. The steering committee must work hard to make sure key groups are involved in the process:

Citizens: Citizen participation is a cornerstone of the DAT process. Citizens have often revealed problems not apparent to the decision-making sector and DAT teams have, on occasion, rejected directives from the establishment that seemed to conflict with the needs of the people of the community. DAT reports are nonpartisan vehicles that serve all citizens. The steering committee should be sure to involve citizens and community groups not usually engaged in the political process. Citizens who are affected directly or indirectly by development issues may not turn up at a meeting without encouragement. A citizen participation subcommittee should identify all of these groups and solicit their participation in the public sessions. Scheduling private meetings for these groups with the team may also be helpful. In any case, the steering committee must establish a mechanism to keep these groups informed and must remain open and accessible to all segments of the community.

Public officials: Local elected leaders must recognize the potential of the DAT process and agree to participate. Public officials and agencies should be encouraged to pool data, collaborate, and work supportively before and after DAT visits. All affected resource and regulatory agencies must take part. The information resources subcommittee should include some of the leaders who can most effectively encourage the participation of their peers.

Stakeholders and opinion leaders (movers and shakers): Identify now those people who are key to the eventual implementation of an action plan. If these people are not key members of the steering committee,

devise a process (e.g., an advisory council, informational lunches, briefing sessions.) that will promote their interest in the DAT effort. These people must have a sense of ownership in the process if they are to help you achieve results.

Steering committee members will now begin to focus on specific tasks, usually through a subcommittee structure that will involve other members of the community. Some typical subcommittees or assignments are community outreach, budget and fundraising, media outreach, and logistics.

Even though the steering committee's attention in this phase will focus on logistical issues, it is very important for committee members to keep in mind that the goal of the DAT process is to implement a plan for positive change. The steering committee should be thinking about how to build the implementation committee, and including some members who are interested in implementation will provide for continuity throughout the process.

2. Selection of a team leader- Team leaders have extensive professional experience and bring special skills to the process, including leadership, sensitivity, an understanding of community development, and an ability to orchestrate the action.
3. Preliminary meetings – A series of meeting should be held prior to the full DAT event. Meetings should include the steering committee, community leaders, planning and/or economic development officials, representatives of the local AIA component, and concerned citizens to begin analyzing the issues. The team leader and the steering committee will set the agenda for the team visit at this time. The team leader will review the community participation process and the media plan. A detailed survey of logistics—

- including a budget and options for the work space and community meeting locations—will be made. The team leader will also discuss details of student involvement with faculty representatives.
4. Setting a date for the team visit- The visit should not be scheduled in conjunction with any other local conference, meeting, or event. Experience has shown that these dilute the effectiveness of a DAT, which works best when it is the “only show in town.” Consider the implications of other significant events such as elections and the timing of other studies or public initiatives.
 5. Team selection- Your team leader and possibly members of the steering committee will select team members who match the needs of your community. The all-volunteer team will consist of highly skilled professionals representing a variety of disciplines.
 6. Student Participation- Architecture students and students in related disciplines can be an important part of the team visit. Performing assignments in support of the team’s work, they can contribute to a more complete report. The heads of participating school(s) of architecture or planning should be asked to recommend their most talented students. The criteria for student participation are the students’ understanding of the principles of urban design and planning, a talent for drawing or writing, and an ability to help with report production or photography. Students must have the ability to work intensely in collaboration with others. Their specific roles will vary with their skills and experience and can be a major learning experience.
 7. Media and public relations- An effective media plan is essential to success. A media and public relations subcommittee should refine the

- details of the media plan and begin to implement items that will continually promote community awareness and enthusiasm.
8. The exact budget and community contribution for a DAT will vary depending on the size of the team, the length and number of copies of the finished report, the total number of visits to the community through all four phases of the DAT process, and other variables.

Community wide in-kind contributions should be encouraged. Many budgeted items may be donated by local organizations, including housing, meals, cars, vans, donated/discounted airfares, and report printing. For example, hotel owners may be willing to make a contribution of rooms or a printer may offer labor. Also, colleges and universities in the area are often willing to help with equipment or facilities. Make sure that in-kind donations are ready in time and meet your needs.

9. Logistics - The various logistical tasks and assignments to be completed during this phase of the process are described in the DAT Logistics document.
10. Preparing the information package - About two weeks before the DAT, an information package should be provided to all team members. Team members may request specific information that has not been provided. Every effort should be made to supply this before the team arrives.

Phase 3: DAT Charette

The focus of the DAT process is the Charette event. This is an exciting time for the community. Broad citizen participation and media attention, combined with the energy and commitment of the team, can inspire a community with newfound confidence and optimism, which will fuel the implementation phase of the process.

1. Schedule- A detailed schedule should be developed in collaboration with the team leader. Each DAT will be different, based on the community's needs and resources.
2. Team tours- It is important to provide the team with a good sense of the entire community. Team tours are often conducted using a number of combinations, including bus, foot, and air tours.
3. Interviews with community leaders and resource people-The team will meet with many diverse groups and may need to split up and exchange information later. The steering committee should coordinate the interviews well in advance, and proposed schedules should be reviewed with the team leader. Careful scheduling is important to avoid overwhelming the team or the meeting space and to conserve people's time. Lunch and dinner on the first day and lunch on the second day can provide an opportunity for team members to meet informally with groups, particularly business and political leaders. Groups that should be represented include:
 - Mayor and city council (or your community's equivalent)
 - Planning board and its key staff
 - Municipal agencies and authorities (transit, housing, public works, economic development, etc.)
 - County/regional authorities and agencies and their key staff
 - Chambers of commerce
 - Downtown or area businesspeople
 - Community groups
 - Community service organizations and other major non-profits
 - Developers and real estate professionals (nonprofit and for profit)
 - Public and private school systems and colleges or universities
 - Environmental, historic preservation, and other groups

Interviews with such groups are best held in a setting that will encourage

informal, candid conversation. Team members may wish to talk again with individuals who have appeared, so it is important to make sure of their availability and to keep a record of those who attend, along with their work, home, and cellular telephone numbers.

4. Meeting with citizen groups- A “town meeting” should be held at a location considered a neutral space. Considerable effort must be made to get people to turn out—notices must go out to various organizations well in advance and follow-up phone calls made the day before. Prior media coverage is essential. The team leader will moderate the meeting. At the team leader’s discretion, the team may divide into groups to facilitate communication. Participants should include:

- Neighborhood organizations
- Community development corporations
- Business groups and individual business owners and managers
- Church groups
- Chief of police
- PTAs
- Senior citizens
- Teenagers and youth groups
- Ethnic groups
- Businesses and business organizations
- Environmental organizations
- Preservation groups and historical societies

Plenty of floor microphones should be set up if the meeting is large.

Tape recording can provide a resource for valuable quotations later on.

Be sure to record the names and phone numbers of all those attending.

The media are welcome.

5. Teamwork - The team works very intensively in three phases, which

occasionally overlap:

- Understanding: learning about your community and its concerns
- Creating: generating ideas that respond to your issues
- Producing: preparing the report and the public presentation

Some members will withdraw from the central activity of the team visit to write or consult with resource people. Others will spend more time interacting with other team members and the public. The team leader is responsible for development and final assembly of the report. Steering committee members and other key volunteers are generally welcome in the work space. Media representatives and a limited number of members of the public may also enjoy the opportunity to observe the work in progress, but this should be cleared with the team leader to avoid interfering with the process.

6. Public presentation -The final presentation to the entire community should be well publicized. Media representatives should be invited and prepped well in advance. The team will present its observations and recommendations, using PowerPoint and other means, for about an hour and sometimes will take another hour for questions and discussion.

This public meeting is a good time for the team leader to present copies of the presentation or, if prepared, the final report, formally to local elected officials. Some time should be allowed for a very brief, formal thank you or response. A wind-down social event for the team, students, steering committee, and other active participants is a welcome close to the evening.

7. Report distribution - The number of copies of the team report will vary from one community to another. A typical distribution might be:

Community—200
Local participants and students—25
Team members—5 each
Local libraries—5 each

Often a local newspaper will print an illustrated summary of the report or even print the report in its entirety. This should be encouraged, as it will allow maximum distribution of the team's findings throughout the community. However, it is not a substitute for daily news coverage during the team visit. Electronic copies of the report should be made available on a project website.

Phase 4: Implementation

In this phase, the community begins to translate the team's report into an action plan for implementing the vision for its future developed during the DAT process. Knowing that a follow-up visit will occur within the year encourages the community to begin developing a plan promptly. This phase begins within a week of the conclusion of the team visit.

1. Implementation committee- The membership of the implementation committee should reflect constituencies affected by potential changes in the community, the commitment of individuals and groups they represent to the effort, and the need for certain skills during this phase. The committee should remain nonpolitical and broadly representative of the community. Continuity provided by including original steering committee members is valuable, but new members can make important contributions.

The implementation committee's structure must respond to a new agenda:

- Review the team's report (months 1-2)
- identify immediate and short-term objectives (months 2-3)

- Develop long-range goals and objectives for implementation within the next 3-5 years (months 4-6)
 - Produce an action plan based on the above items (months 4-6)
 - Maintain broad community involvement and interest (ongoing)
 - Support implementation efforts (ongoing)
2. Review the team's presentation and report - The implementation committee should develop an immediate strategy for discussing the report, identifying priorities, and determining which areas need further attention. As soon as possible, the committee should obtain endorsements and commitments from public officials for the presentation recommendations for which there is consensus. To maintain the inclusive spirit of the DAT process, solicit feedback from involved groups and individuals as well as other interested parties. Maintaining a database of those who participated in the earlier phases makes it possible to solicit feedback through mailings and encourage continuing interest. This work should be completed within weeks of the team visit in order to maintain momentum.
 3. Produce an action plan - After soliciting broad community participation in the development of goals and objectives, the implementation committee should produce a document that will become the community's action plan. The outline for this document will vary, but it should include a clear description of the community's vision for its future; a statement of long-range goals; a list of objectives to be achieved over the next three to five years, including identification of kickoff projects that can be completed in the next 12 months; a summary of actions needed to achieve the objectives; and a funding strategy identifying sources of funding. Include a map of the community that shows where funds will be spent and where projects will be completed. This map will be the basis for describing your overall community strategy.

The success of the action plan depends on people seeing results quickly—the momentum that builds with short-term achievement can sustain a community for years to come. Identify a few achievable, high-visibility projects that are certain of early success and support the long-range goals. Consider projects that are likely to energize the community and expand the number of people who will help implement the overall plan. A community with the goal of revitalizing its downtown, for example, might identify projects such as hiring a downtown-events coordinator, razing a condemned eyesore, establishing a visitors' center, creating a volunteer cleanup program, arranging tours for potential investors, or approving projects already in the budget pipeline.

After discussing the report, the implementation committee defines the community's goals and priorities over the next three to five years and identifies objectives that will help you achieve them. There are many ways to accomplish this, but whatever the process, the implementation committee must remain open and responsive to community feedback. To revitalize its downtown, for example, a community's long-term objectives could include relocating town offices from a highway site to the business district, developing a new traffic plan, restoring historic building façades, or establishing a special-assessment business-improvement district.

A good action plan will include benchmarks and triggers for action—ways to measure your progress and successes that will allow the community to celebrate its achievements. Benchmarks will vary with your objectives but might include enactment of regulatory changes; completion of buildings, parks, or infrastructure improvements; and statistical measurements, such as a 25 percent increase in tourist traffic or a donor-participation target in a community-projects fund. Solicit endorsement of the action plan by political leaders, and be sure to follow through with newly elected officials. Future political candidates should understand the plan and the grassroots

process behind its development.

4. Maintain broad community involvement and interest - Develop a public relations strategy that uses events, mailings, and the media to maintain the visibility of the DAT process and encourage continuing participation. Distribution of the action plan and the team's return visit should receive special attention, but establishing an ongoing presence in the community is an equally important effort. The implementation committee might sponsor events like public information meetings, workshops, or leadership retreats. There is also value in joining with other community groups to sponsor events like local heritage-day celebrations, festivals, and gala evenings.