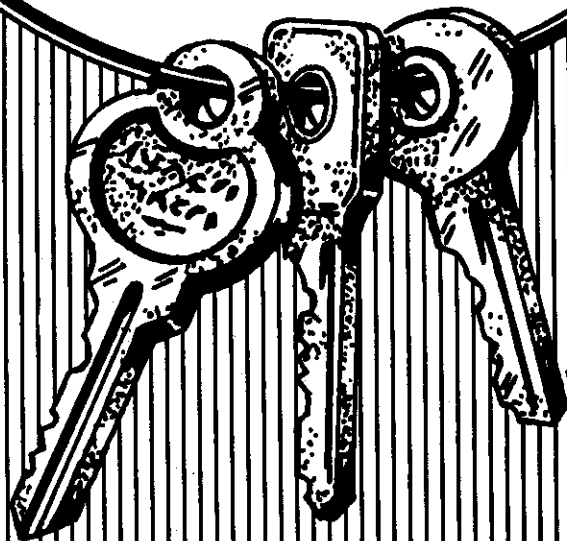


# KEYS to Communities



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**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Ames, Iowa 50010



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## Foreword

One of the most needed life skills is learning to live together—in our families and clubs, yes, but also in our communities. Young people working together with adults can make a significant contribution to community development and improvement in the quality of our environment.

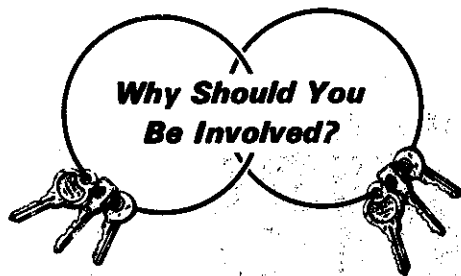
Whether you live in a city, a small town, or on a farm, you can see the effects of man's relationship to his environment and to his fellow man. Some of the effects are pleasant and desirable. Others show the result of man's neglect, carelessness and lack of concern for others.

Keys to Communities is about a program where young people and adults work together to make their community a more attractive, safe or healthful place to live. They strive to develop a community where there is an attitude of concern. . .concern

for every individual and his physical, social, cultural, economic and spiritual needs. Pride in ourselves and our communities is the key to quality of life.

Keys to Communities is about an action program. Action groups focus on a specific project which will improve the appearance, the human relationships, or the quality of services offered in a community. The project is determined by the people of the community, both youth and adults, and should have as a goal improvement in quality of living.

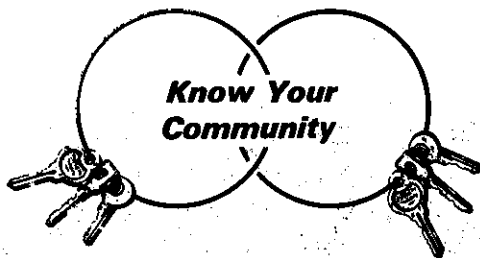
The result of the project is important. Even more important is the group's experience of going through the process to bring about change. The process can help youth and adults listen to each other, learn, share concerns, and build mutual trust and confidence as they work toward a common goal.



In many Iowa communities, youth outnumber adults. Youth are members of the community and its subsystems. They have concerns about their community. In addition, they have intelligence, enthusiasm and energy to contribute to their community.

Since everyone will spend his or her lifetime in some community, community projects will affect your life. Involvement in a project not only will provide some benefit to the community, but it can show you how a community operates. It will provide an understanding of how community decisions are made, who makes them, how traditions and values affect decisions, how change occurs and how ideas are converted into action. You also may learn about the resources—or lack of resources—in your community such as the human, physical and economic resources. And it will help you develop leadership skills.

A community project can be your opportunity to try using the keys to your community, which can be fun, educational and beneficial.



We all live in communities. And we all know something about community life. But when someone asks us to describe or define a community, we

suddenly realize how complex a community really is.

Part of the problem is that the word community is applied to many different things. There are small communities within larger communities. Some people have said a school is a community of students. Generally, we're concerned with a broader community than a school. The community we're talking about has three general elements:

- It is a limited area—it has boundaries, though these boundaries may not be the legal ones. For instance, people living outside the city limits may feel they are part of a community, and are a part of it.
- People of a community have a sense of belonging together—they have common ties or interests.
- A community serves as a base to satisfy all or most of the needs for a number of people—which a school or neighborhood may not do.

A community can be a small part of a larger city, or the farming area around a school, church or general store. With modern transportation and communications, the community may serve people with education, jobs, or retail trade and services far beyond its formal boundaries.

Transportation, communication and our government organization also tie the local community to the "outside world." Communities are tied economically, socially, and politically to counties, regions, states, the nation and the world. These relationships may influence what is or can be done in the local community. And some small communities may have to strengthen relationships with a larger community to provide certain goods or services to its people. We'll discuss examples of that later.

A community might be compared to an automobile. The community is a social system, while the auto is a mechanical system. Each has subsystems or parts which perform certain jobs that are necessary to keep the total system going.

A community has four basic subsystems or parts: political, economic, cultural and social. The political

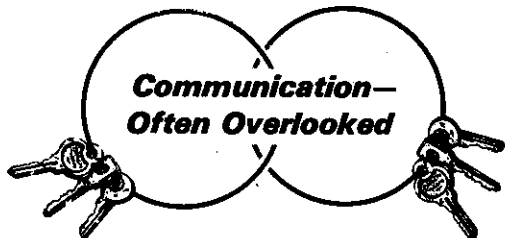
system includes government, political parties, pressure groups, special interest groups, and of course, voters, who make decisions in the community. It's much like the control subsystem of the auto, which includes the steering, brakes, gear shift and throttle. The political subsystem may determine if the community stops, goes or backs up; speeds up or slows down; and what direction it will go.

The economic subsystem provides employment for local people and makes goods and services available. It is somewhat like the energy subsystem of the auto, generating jobs and goods, converting fuel into useful services, storing surplus energy and transferring it within the subsystem.

The cultural subsystem is made up of institutions such as the church and school. Shared by both youth and adults, these institutions pass on customs, traditions and values that are important to a specific community. The cultural subsystem may give the community a certain appearance as the body of the auto. The community culture may be as thrifty as an imported compact; as functional as a station wagon; as conventional as a 4-door sedan; as flashy as a convertible; as wealthy as a limousine; as conservative as a classic; or more likely, it's as unique as a custom model with its own special features.

The social system is made up of people and the groups to which they belong. The relationships between groups and interactions between people in the local community are part of the social subsystem. This subsystem compares to the passengers in the car. The passengers may decide where they want to go and select the driver. The driver may decide when more fuel is needed, or add oil to keep the system working smoothly. He may get help from back-seat drivers. The passengers also may use the political subsystem to place restrictions on the driver, or even upon themselves. Often these are safety measures to keep the community from being damaged or the passengers from being hurt. And the passengers may decide to elect a new driver at the next election!

Like the auto subsystems, the community subsystems should be linked together and should perform together. But they may not be linked or may break down at times. Obviously, the cultural, social and political systems are closely tied together. But a little observation will show that the economic subsystem also affects the other subsystems both directly and indirectly.



One of the important keys to communities is communication. It is often overlooked when projects are planned. Probably communication is overlooked because everyone just assumes it's there and takes it for granted. But planning the communications part of your program may be the secret to success.

Communication has been called the thread that makes up the social fabric. It is the thread that ties all of our community subsystems together. It can link the economic, social, cultural and political subsystems together so the community goes the direction we want.

There are some who say communication would solve all our problems. If we could just talk to our enemies, or those who cause us problems, we could work things out. That is expecting too much from communication. But communication is necessary—and it may solve some problems. But you know, too, that some people disagree on certain things, and sometimes no amount of talking is going to solve the problem.

One community in northern Iowa has made dramatic progress in making that town a better place to live. The community completed about 18 projects in less than a year. The secret was communication—by this we mean getting people involved with their community to talk about it, and to talk about their needs and problems. But that community spent a long time developing their system of communication, probably three times as much time as it took to do the actual projects.

This community used a survey as the main tool of its communication. The survey was used to find out what people really wanted, what they needed, and what they were willing to do for their community. A series of meetings and newspaper articles got others involved and talking. The magic began to work when people began to say:

"Gee, I always felt that was a problem, but I didn't realize so many others thought the same thing. . ."

"We thought about that, but we didn't know if it was a good idea or not, so we didn't do anything about it. Now we'll go ahead. . ."

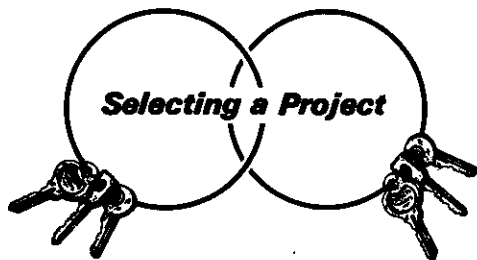
And not only did this community find out what people really wanted, many groups, clubs and individuals decided to pitch in and do the job—once they found out it was important to other people.

A survey is one communications tool, but, as we indicate later, there are others. Anything that brings people together and begins them talking can serve as a tool. Finding what really is important to people, or knowing your community, is the vital key.

So plan communications as part of your project. Begin with your own group. See that there's opportunity for all people to get acquainted, to discuss things as they see them, and what they'd like to see done.

And, as things are often done, this publication for youth has been written by adults. Is your community like the one we adults have described? Or is a community something different for youth? Maybe one of the best contributions you could make would be to define a community as youth sees it. What does a community do for youth? What should a community do for youth? And finally, what can and should youth do for the community?

□ □ □ □



Some community groups are formed because of a problem. In other communities, there is such an obvious need that there is no question about what project is to be done. If either of these situations exist in your community, you already have a project. You can move to the next section of this publication on the project checklist.

Most groups, however, are looking for a project they can conduct to improve their communities. There are several ways you can develop ideas for a project. These include:

**Group Discussion**—Let everyone in the group talk about the things he or she would like to see done in the community. One person's idea may trigger another idea from someone else. If the group can easily agree on a project, move to the project checklist. But there may be a number of good ideas, making it hard to pick one. You might select about three of the best ideas and assign committees to gather facts and to describe the problem carefully. The types of facts needed are suggested in the checklist.

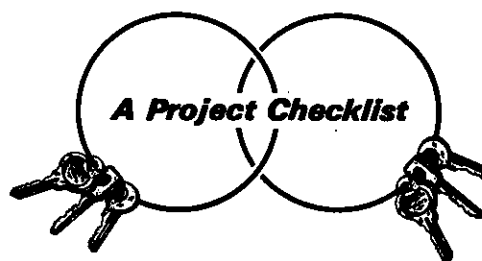
**Brainstorming**—Brainstorming is similar to group discussion, except that ideas are not discussed at the time they are suggested. Everyone is asked to call out any problem, project or needs he can think of. The idea is written down, but not discussed, no matter how "wild" it might sound. When the group has listed all the ideas it can, each item is discussed and considered. Some of those "crazy" ideas are discarded, others may be modified into worthwhile projects. Again, if you can easily select a project, move to the checklist. If not, assign committees to look at the most promising ideas.

**Group Assignment**—Another way to develop project ideas is to assign committees to look at certain parts of your community. You might assign committees to recreation, services, beautification, culture, and so on. Ask committees to list problems and projects for consideration by the group.

**Survey**—A community survey can be used to get ideas on what the people need. Sometimes you may want to use a survey for this purpose. Other times, the survey may be more valuable later to gather facts about a specific problem. Surveys can be of many types. You can do a careful scientific survey in your community. Usually, the better the survey, the more valuable it is. But an informal survey will often supply answers that are good enough for your purpose.

The main thing in a survey is to talk to all kinds of people. In the scientific survey, certain

steps are followed so that all types of people are included. If you want to do this type of survey, an Iowa State University publication is available that describes the process.<sup>1</sup> You may also want to get the help of an adult with some experience in surveys. But in an informal survey, you can get good results by talking to enough people of all types. Don't just talk to your friends—they may think just the way you do. Talk to people of different ages, with different jobs and in all parts of town. With certain projects, you may want to talk only with special types of people, such as young ones, or elderly people. See the checklist section on "is it really needed." If you're looking for project ideas in an informal survey, talk to someone who recently moved to your community. They may see your community a little differently, can compare it to other communities, and may bring new ideas.



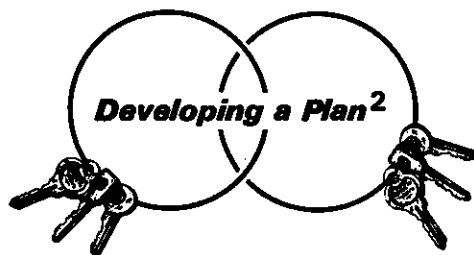
If you have one project or several that you are considering, use the following checklist. It can help you decide if you want to go ahead with the one you've selected, or it might help you decide which of several projects you want to work on. Take your idea and—

1. Define the problem. Be as complete as you can. Who is affected by the problem? What causes the problem? How will your project help? Is the problem caused because your community is growing, declining, or changing?
2. What other facts do you need? When you try to define the problem, you may find you don't know as much about it as you'd like. What else do you need to know, or what would it help to know? How can you find out these facts? (Some suggested sources of facts and information are listed later in this publication.)
3. Is the problem an important one? How many people does it affect? A serious problem, even though it affects only a few people still may make a worthwhile project. But this factor may affect how successful you will be, or how you go about the project.
4. Can you really do anything about the problem? There are some problems that are quite important. But sometimes, there isn't much local people or certain groups can do about the problem. For example, a problem in many towns is not enough

<sup>1</sup>C. Phillip Baumel, Daryl J. Hobbs and Ronald C. Powers, *The Community Survey*, Soc. 15, Iowa State University Extension Service, Ames, Iowa (80 cents).

jobs, which often forces people to move away. But most groups can't provide jobs directly. Possibly they can do something to help indirectly. Making your town more attractive may make it more inviting for an industry to move there. Or sponsoring a career day may help people decide about a job. These can be valuable projects. But they don't solve the problem directly. The important thing is to know where your project fits, so you can judge the results properly, so that you or others don't expect too much from the project.

5. Is the project too large? Again, be realistic. Are you taking on a project that you can do successfully? Someone once said you should strive for projects in the middle range. Some projects are so simple they don't mean much. Others are so big that no one can accomplish the task, even though the projects sound exciting and hold great promise. So select a project in the middle—large enough that it makes a contribution, but small enough that you can handle it.
6. Is the project really needed? Sometimes, there's no doubt that a project is needed. Other times, you may not know, or maybe only your group thinks it is needed. A survey can be used here to find out if a project is needed or wanted. Be particularly careful when you plan a project for someone else. Have you ever heard of adults who planned a teen center because adults were sure the youth needed it? Many such centers have failed because youth didn't feel that way—or the center didn't really meet their needs. In one town, most of the adults thought the elderly needed a Golden Age Center. But a survey showed that when the elderly were asked, few felt such a center was needed. It's great to do things for others—but be sure that's what is needed. Don't help the little old lady across the street when that isn't where she wants to go.
7. Do you have agreement on the project? Does the community agree that the project is needed so you'll have support? Is your group agreed that this is what they want to do? Hopefully the other steps in this project checklist have helped your group select the best, most needed project. But remember there may have been many other ideas for projects earlier. Are some people holding out for something else, or will they pitch in on the project selected?



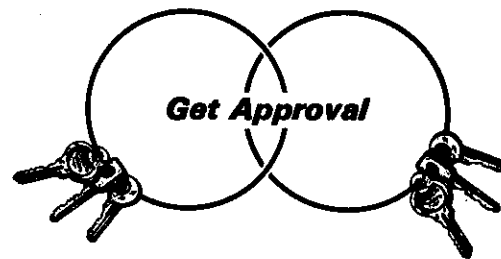
One of the first steps in making an action plan is to look at the social subsystems mentioned earlier. What other groups are there in the community who are interested in the project you are planning? Will

they help you? Or will they think you're competing with them? Has anyone else ever tried this type of project and failed? Why? Are conditions right so that your project can succeed? For instance, in many communities, the population is getting smaller. Many stores or services once in the community are gone because there are no longer enough people to support them. Are there enough people or money in your town to support the project you plan? If not, you may have to look to one of the larger communities such as a county or group of counties to provide the base you need.

Look also at the cultural subsystem of your community. How are things usually done there? What is tradition? Are most things accomplished by all the people working together? Or do a few people do the job? If your idea is new and different, how do people accept new ideas?

Answering these questions may help you develop a better plan and avoid difficulties.

<sup>2</sup>This section is a simplified version of the social action process. For a more detailed version, see George M. Beal and Daryl J. Hobbs, *Social Action, the Process in Community and Area Development*, Soc. 16, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.



With the knowledge obtained in earlier steps, you should know who is likely to be involved and concerned about your project. You may want at this point to discuss your project with other people in the community. Certain leaders may not be involved directly in the project, but it is helpful—even necessary sometimes—to have their approval. If the project involves public or private property, obviously, you'll have to have permission. A clean-up campaign along streets or highways may need approval of the highway department, city council, or county commissioners. These groups also may provide some of the equipment you'll need.

At this point, your idea is beginning to spread to other members of the community. This is good. You may even want to help spread word of the idea. This will allow other people to think about the idea and react to it. It will help you decide whether you are on the right track or not.

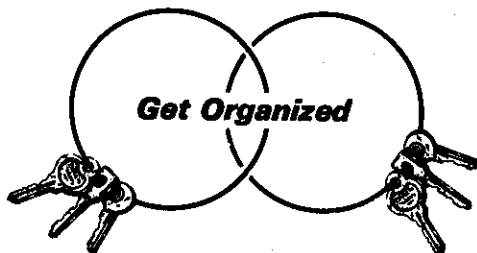
But when more people hear of the project, don't be surprised if they suggest changes. Sometimes the changes will improve the project and you'll welcome them. You also may get suggestions you don't like. In this way, you'll be learning about the community and those hazy things called values or tradition.

You may have to decide to modify your project in order to get the approval of some people—either within your own group or in the community. Now you're learning about compromise and the political

process, tools used to resolve conflicts over goals or needs. Or you may decide to go ahead just as the project was designed. Without suggested changes, some people may not help. It's possible that some will feel so strongly that they'll oppose the project.

If you've gone through some of the earlier steps carefully, you'll probably not encounter much opposition, especially if your project answers a need and is good for the community.

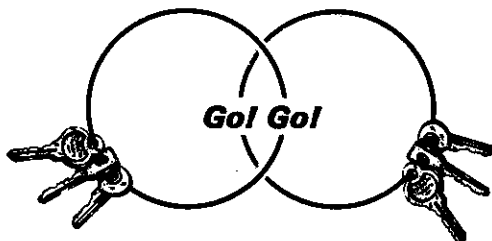
For more complex projects, another step is often needed. But this step is usually only necessary where a vote is needed to approve bonds or something of this nature. To get more people aware of the problem, educational programs, surveys, campaigns, demonstrations and other activities are used to gain the attention and support of people. We're assuming your project won't require these steps. But you may want to use the newspaper, radio and television to promote your project, explain it, or to gain cooperation or support.



Probably most of the work on your project will be done by members of your group. Now that you have the project, you need to organize to get the job done. Your organization plan should include:

- What is going to be done.
- Who is going to do it.
- What materials will be needed.
- When the job is to be done.
- How the job is to be done.

A committee system can be used, depending on the kind and size of the project. Dividing the work makes everyone's task a little easier, and often people can work on a particular part of the project that interests them. You might use an over-all planning committee, a supply committee to arrange for materials and supplies, a work committee and a publicity committee.

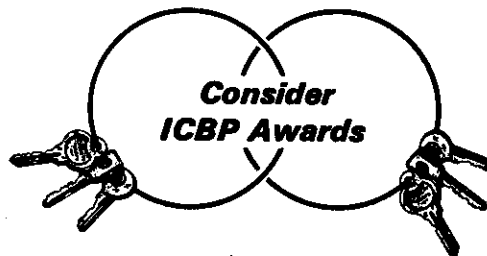


With everything organized, the materials at hand, and everyone knowing what is expected, the next step is to do the job. It's a good idea to complete

the project as soon as possible. Work while interest and enthusiasm are high.



When the job is done, let people know about it. Give credit to those who have helped you or provided materials. Much of this job can be done by the publicity committee through newspaper, radio or television. But the publicity committee has much work to do before completion of the project. They can help obtain support and interest in the project before it begins. And they should have photographs taken before a project is started so they can show the change. Take photos before a cleanup project begins—and then afterward; or take a photo of the vacant spot in the park before the water fountain is added, or the shrubbery planted.

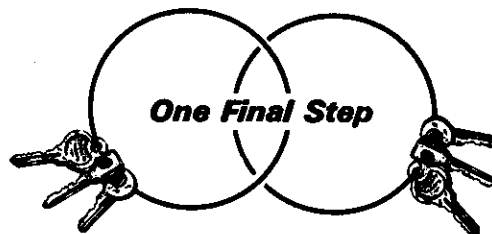


The Iowa Community Betterment Program (ICBP) provides a companion opportunity for groups working toward the betterment of Iowa communities. ICBP offers cash prizes, other awards and recognition to communities in each of seven population categories.

ICBP recognizes that young people hold the key to successful development and future of any city or town. A "Youth Involvement Award" is offered to communities that give their young people an active and meaningful role in the ICB Program.

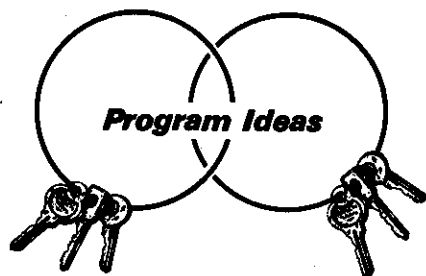
All incorporated and unincorporated Iowa municipalities are eligible to compete. More information is available from:

*Director, Iowa Community Betterment Program  
State Office for Planning and Programming  
Division of Municipal Affairs  
State Capitol Building  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319*



Evaluation and follow-up is the final step. Some

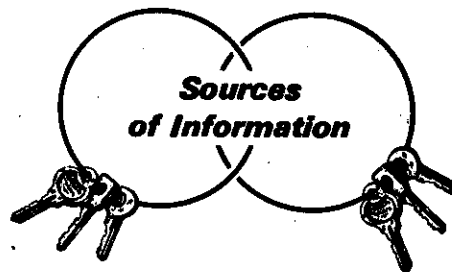
projects may need no further attention. But some projects may need some maintenance or continuation. Make plans for this. Your evaluation and report should include some ideas on how the project could have been done differently, or how certain problems might have been avoided. Pass on some of the lessons you learned.



Hopefully the process outlined allowed you to come up with a project that fit your special community needs. That's the best kind. But sometimes, ideas from other communities can be helpful in suggesting projects. Here are a few suggestions.

- Turn a vacant lot into a children's park, or a demonstration ornamental or vegetable garden.
- Start a shopping service for shut-ins.
- Clean up and plant roadsides, parks or scenic areas.
- Develop a summer theater, arts and crafts show and sale, or talent show.
- Help restore a historic spot by cleaning, painting and repairing.
- Conduct day camps for children who might not otherwise go to camp.
- Hold a bike safety check program.
- Conduct a recycling program.
- Have a youth-adult discussion to bridge the generation gap.
- Develop a program for the 1976 Bicentennial.
- Start a community heritage center.
- Provide assistance, services or companionship for the elderly.
- Beautify the entrance to your town with a sign and landscaping.
- Be a big sister or big brother group to a handicapped child.
- Establish a biking or hiking trail.
- Develop recreation facilities.

- Provide a job placement service for young people in the summer.



There are many private organizations and government agencies that can provide information that will be of help in community projects. The local library also is a good source of information.

Listed below are some local contacts for project information. Many of these organizations can suggest state or national sources of material, also. One source of material is **Community Understanding and Action**, published by Extension Service USDA. This 11-part publication is on file at your county extension service office. The first part is a basic unit examining a community. The remaining 10 parts deal with specific project material—history and fine art; government; natural resources and conservation; production and marketing; transportation, communication and public utilities; education; recreation; religion and churches; community health; and community welfare. In addition—

**For beautification, conservation, parks and recreation projects, contact:**

County Conservation Commission

County Extension Director

County or City Recreation Specialists

County Commissioners

Garden Clubs

Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

**For Community improvement and development projects:**

Chamber of Commerce

City Council

County Extension Director

Junior Chamber of Commerce

League of Women Voters

**On Programs for People:**

City or County Housing Commissions

County Extension Director

County Department of Social Services

Local ministers and church organizations

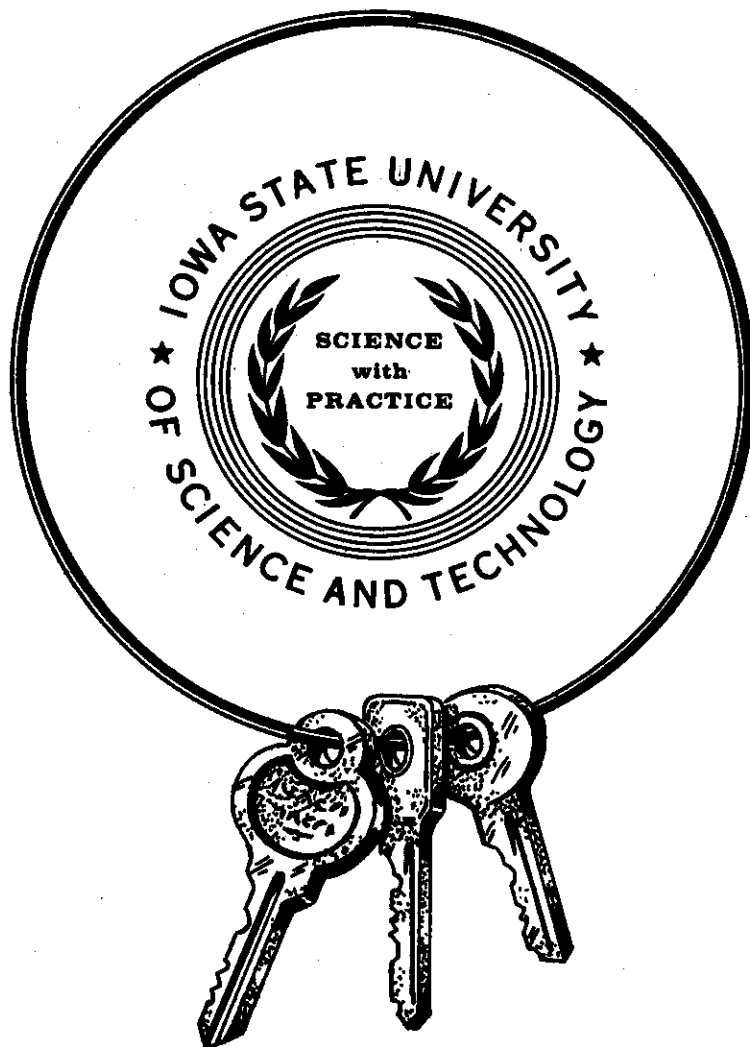
Rest Homes

Special organizations for health or handicapped,

etc. (check yellow pages in the telephone directory under associations, social service organizations, or clubs).

School Superintendent

Youth Centers



Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Marvin A. Anderson, director, Ames, Iowa. Distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914.

**... AND JUSTICE FOR ALL**

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