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INITIATIVE

Engaging the Community in Shifting Culture and Building a New Economy:

An Analysis of the Community Progress Initiative

December 2008

by Mary Emery

North Central Regional Center
for Rural Development

December 2008

Engaging the Community in Shifting Culture and Building a New Economy: An Analysis of the Community Progress Initiative, a Joint Initative Between the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance and the Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County, was prepared by:

Mary Emery, Assistant Director
North Central Regional Center for Rural Development
Iowa State University
107 Curtiss Hall
Ames, IA 50011-1050
(515) 294-8321, (515) 294-3180 fax
http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu

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Executive Summary

Many communities grapple with the need to address the rapid economic and social changes that globalization creates. The Community Progress Initiative (CPI) is the story of how one community is succeeding in addressing those changes. CPI emerged from devastating economic decline as a way to involve citizens not only in shaping a realistic vision for the future, but also in implementing that vision in inclusive and collaborative ways.

The geographic location of CPI is defined as the Greater South Wood County area located in the heart of central Wisconsin, which includes the town of Rome in northern Adams County. The Community Progress Initiative (CPI) has been described as:

> a joint partnership between the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance and the Community Foundation of South Wood County…established to promote responsible, collaborative, and visionary citizenship that would ultimately transform community culture and invigorate economic development (Millesen, 2008: 9).

CPI was formed in response to major changes in the local economy, including the loss of 39 percent of the jobs (Millesen et al., 2007: 6). In their study, *Economic Devastation, Renewal and Growth: The Role of Community Foundations as Catalysts for Change,* the authors describe the impact of globalization on the local area. In another study, *Community Economic Development at its Finest: A Case Study of the Community Progress Initiative,* Millesen comments that, "Not only had the economy in this community been devastated, personal attitudes and beliefs about the future had also suffered" (2008: 8).

Millesen concluded that, "The Community Progress Initiative is a model of institutional collaboration and community capacity building that has restored a sense of local control among citizens in the Greater South Wood County region" and that, "The Community Progress Initiative is truly a story of hardship, rejuvenation, hope and rebirth. It's a story of strength, determination and a collective belief in the common good" (pp. 28-29).

The CPI began as a three-year effort but is currently in the middle of its fifth year. Both key partners are reflecting on the work, its successes and challenges as they look to the future. This report incorporates findings from previous studies, data collected by staff on participation and outcomes, and the results of a qualitative study to analyze successes and challenges. The report summarizes feedback from the community on suggestions for next steps and offers recommendations. The qualitative data was collected in May and June 2008 from 23 interviewees, 15 focus groups, and four community conversations.

Many communities have attempted change initiatives but lack the capacity to engage the citizenry, often leading to increased frustration and despair. Others succeed in engaging community members but are unable to sustain engagement over time. CPI stands out for its ability to both engage citizens in working to create a viable community and to sustain and expand that engagement over time. As such, the CPI story offers both a story of hope and a collection of best practices that other leaders can use to help their communities address the challenge of change.

Recommendations Related to Future Directions

1. Consider using the opportunity for a next big event to not only celebrate successes but to also engage people in dialogue about what structure and name or brand they want to see CPI adopt for the future.

2. Find ways to preserve the structure and process people describe as key to CPI success.

3. Preserve the brand; it has meaning across the community. Changing it may invite suggestions of failure.

Specific Program-related Recommendations

1. Convene a committee around the social services and invite the faith community to participate. Recruit members of these groups to personally invite others to the first meeting.

2. Working with the faith community can help CPI reach deeper into the community and expand Speak Your Peace (SYP).

3. Respondents were less sure of what CPI does to support the economy, so helping people understand the entrepreneurship pipeline and the role of CPI in business and job development would be helpful.

4. Youth expressed great interest in being more involved. Is there a youth representative on any of the leadership advisory councils? Can they be represented at the cluster/networks co-chairs meetings? Are there other ways several youth can participate at this level?

5. Encourage a youth-led task force; explore creating a youth council to CPI.

6. In a similar evaluation of another community capacity building effort, the evaluator learned that leadership programs that included both youth and adults were highly successful and were able to create a

space for the youth voice in important ways. Perhaps a leadership alumni event across programs could address this opportunity.

7. Offer a Boot Camp for additional young people.

8. Revisit the possibility of developing a young professionals' network or group to attract young adults.

9. Several people mentioned that finding ways to get young people to stay or return is critical to the future of the community. Integrating youth attraction strategies into CPI can expand the conversation and the possibilities for action.

10. While many people were able to explain why they were involved in a particular organization or program, others were taking direction and asking for more guidance from CPI. Working to make the theory of change more apparent in programs could help people understand what their next step might be and would increase local capacity.

11. Some Community Progress Teams/Progress Fund Committees have been very successful; yet all of the focus groups reported a need for more support, another launch, or help with recruiting volunteers. If these committees are provided with a coach whose charge is to help them build their own capacity, these committees can develop the skills and knowledge to be more effective and learn about tools that can make community work more effective.

12. Continue to expand SYP and include additional young people as ambassadors and presenters.

13. Address the need for leadership succession within CPI committees and activities and the related and ongoing concern about recruiting enough volunteers to continue the work.

14. People spoke of the need to reconnect with people, often asking for another big event, perhaps a celebratory event, to highlight both successes and the many "small acts."

CPI has accomplished a great deal; it has engaged citizens, created businesses, and increased civility and collaboration across communities. The theory of change underlying the CPI logic model focused on changing perceptions to reframe not only future opportunities, but also the role of citizens in taking responsibility for taking charge and implementing strategies to create a vibrant and sustainable economy. Despite ongoing declines in the paper industry, CPI continues to provide people with a way to support their community and to identify economic, political, and social opportunities for community betterment. In this regard, CPI has a phenomenal track record. Wisely, CPI leaders have engaged in a process of evaluation and reflection to learn from successes and to plan for the future. This report offers some suggestions to guide them on the next stage of their journey.

Engaging the Community in Shifting Culture and Building a New Economy: An Analysis of the Community Progress Initiative

I hope that like a ripple in a pond, the Community Progress Initiative will spread throughout the Central Wisconsin area.

Julie Lassa, Wisconsin State Senator

Introduction

Many communities grapple with the need to address the rapid economic and social changes that globalization creates. The Community Progress Initiative (CPI) is the story of how one community is succeeding in addressing those changes. CPI emerged from devastating economic decline as a way to involve citizens not only in shaping a realistic vision for the future, but also in implementing that vision in inclusive and collaborative ways. CPI undertook an outside evaluation as part of its internal evaluation and planning process. The purpose of the outside evaluation was to collect qualitative data to supplement the internal study of outcomes and impacts. This report presents the results of that evaluation.

Many communities have attempted change initiatives but lack the capacity to engage the citizenry, often leading to increased frustration and despair. Others succeed in engaging community members but are unable to sustain engagement over time. CPI stands out for its ability to both engage citizens in working to create a viable community and to sustain and expand that engagement over time. As such, this analysis of CPI offers both a story of hope and a collection of best practices that other leaders can use to help their communities address the challenge of change.

Organization of the Report

The report is organized with an Executive Summary that briefly describes the process and summarizes key findings. The body of the report includes an introduction and description of the scope of the evaluation followed by a short summary on the background of CPI first, findings related to specific programs second, and an overview of the methodology and data collection process follows. The subsequent section on key findings presents overall findings related to CPI, findings related to specific programs, and evaluators' recommendations followed by a short conclusion. The appendices include a list of key questions that emerged from discussions with the CPI Evaluation Advisory Committee, notes from Community Conversations, and participation in the focus groups.

Scope of the Evaluation

The outside evaluation was commissioned to provide input into planning for what comes next. The specific charge from the CPI Evaluation Advisory Committee included four key points.

1. Be inclusive of residents from each of the seven communities involved in CPI.

2. Review and analyze existing data, supplemented as necessary with additional research and interviews, and draft a report that will be easy for people to read and understand.

3. Conduct learning conversations with key audiences/stakeholders and engage them in two tasks: 1) reviewing the draft report and suggesting refinements and elaborations, and 2) problem-solving about ways to further deepen, support and sustain future work.

4. Produce a final report that incorporates the changes suggested by the process described above and that makes recommendations regarding how and in what form the work might continue going forward.

Recommendations should reflect realistic expectations for the future and, ideally, articulate the roles of possible stakeholders in future implementation. The report should also include an easy-to-read narrative analysis of existing data and other evaluation findings that relate to accomplishments achieved in fulfilling desired outcomes to date.

Appendix 1 includes a list of key questions that emerged from discussions with the CPI Evaluation Advisory Committee: Guadalupe Ancel, Dale Arendt, Doug Easterling, Steve Knorr, Connie Loden, Kelly Lucas, Dean Ryerson, Fred Siemers and Dawn Vruwink. Staff from each of the partnering organizations helped organize sessions and interviews in order to ensure that all seven communities were represented. They also organized the Community Conversations held in June on the preliminary evaluation results.

The Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County (CFGSWC) in collaboration with the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance (HOW) engaged others to conduct studies on the impact of CPI, and staff have collected and analyzed a great deal of data on the various programs related to participation and outcomes. The purpose of this analysis of CPI is to incorporate the results of those efforts into one report that uses qualitative data to broaden our understanding of the previous work and to provide recommendations on next steps.

Background

The Greater South Wood County area is located in central Wisconsin and is home to just over 40,000 residents. The region is approximately 200 square miles and includes the seven rural communities of Nekoosa, Pittsville, Port Edwards, Rome, Rudolph, Vesper, and Wisconsin Rapids as well as their surrounding townships, villages, etc. (Millesen, 2008: 8)

The Community Progress Initiative (CPI) has been described as:

a joint partnership between the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance and the Community Foundation of South Wood County…

established to promote responsible, collaborative, and visionary citizenship that would ultimately transform community culture and invigorate economic development (Millesen, 2008: 9).

CPI was formed in response to major changes in the local economy, including the loss of 39 percent of the jobs (Millesen et al., 2007: 6). In their study, *Economic Devastation, Renewal and Growth: The Role of Community Foundations as Catalysts for Change,* the authors describe the impact of globalization on the local area. As Millesen states in another study, *Community Economic Development at its Finest: A Case Study of the Community Progress Initiative,* "Not only had the economy in this community been devastated, personal attitudes and beliefs about the future had also suffered" (2008: 8).

Millesen et al. (2007) identify three factors that contributed to the successful development and launch of CPI, including a "profound belief among community members that 'something' had to be done" (p. 18), organizational transformations at the Heart of Wisconsin Economic and Business Alliance (HOW) and the Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County (CFGSWC), and renewed interest by two major philanthropic families (Barkers and Meads). These factors created the opportunity for new leaders to take a new approach to addressing three key challenges: 1) the "culture of entitlement that had given rise to complacency and an inability to challenge the status quo" (p. 30), 2) the need to rethink economic development approaches and assumptions, and 3) the necessity to "be responsive to people's fear" (p. 30). The key goals of the CPI include (April 2004-March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes report):

- Develop a prosperous and diverse local economy.
- Build a strong and positive local community.
- Create an innovative, entrepreneurial, and self reliant local culture.

To achieve these goals, the initiators saw a need to focus on commitment, capacity and structure with the expectation of the following overall outcomes:

- To create an innovative, self-reliant, and business-friendly culture in a vibrant community with a prosperous local economy.
- To create a business-friendly environment and empower entrepreneurs.

- To shape a shared vision for people throughout the region.
- To stimulate new enterprises, resulting in additional job opportunities.
- To inspire community spirit and pride.
- To motivate emerging young leaders to drive positive change.
- To build the area's charitable assets to support sustainable community development and foster self-reliance.

In her study, *Community Economic Development at Its Finest: a Case Study of the Community Progress Initiative,* Millesen (2008: 25) describes six strategies that led to the initiation of CPI:

1. Use existing resources differently.
2. Increase the flow of dollars.
3. Act smarter.
4. Attract public funds.
5. Change or reinterpret the rules.
6. Recognize and be appreciative of the unexpected.

She concluded that, "The Community Progress Initiative is a model of institutional collaboration and community capacity building that has restored a sense of local control among citizens in the Greater South Wood County region" and that, "The Community Progress Initiative is truly a story of hardship, rejuvenation, hope and rebirth. It's a story of strength, determination, and a collective belief in the common good" (pp. 28-29).

In their study on the role of foundations in addressing economic devastation, Millesen and her team found that the CPI increased self-reliance in the town of Rome and that, "a number of major community players and citizens joined forces to overcome considerable obstacles in an effort to shape and develop the policies and structures essential to broad-based community change" (Millesen, et al., 2007; abstract). They identified six elements that contributed to the success of CPI (p. iii):
- Effective leadership is inclusive leadership.
- Model the behavior expected of others.
- Meaningful communication also involves listening.
- If the right people are not at the table, find someone who can bring them on board.

- Do not marginalize the concerns of those who are not initially supportive of your work.
- Most meaningful change is incremental; be patient and stay the course.

Indeed, Millesen and her team (2007) comment that the CFGSWC has "set a new benchmark of achievement for the civic engagement of community foundations" (p. 17). Her second study on CPI describes the key role of the second partner, HOW in the CPI in success.

The CPI began as a three-year effort but is currently in the middle of its fifth year. Both key partners are reflecting on the successes and challenges of the work as they look to the future. This report looks briefly at those successes and challenges, summarizes feedback from the community on suggestions for next steps, and offers recommendations.

Methodology

This evaluation used a mixed methods approach, relying on the April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report compiled by staff, past studies of CPI, and the collection of additional qualitative data. The interview and focus group protocols were designed using Appreciative Inquiry as a lens for viewing project activities and participant feedback. This lens focuses attention on what is working, how and why, and how it might work better. The study also incorporated some elements of the Most Significant Change approach (Dart and Davies, 2003) to learn more about respondent views on the most significant changes emerging from the Initiative. The interview and focus group processes provided insights into how CPI is working, what impact CPI has had on communities, and what ideas people have for next steps. The following quote summarizes how many felt about the outside evaluation process:

I know this is getting people's opinions and sometimes they are rather subjective about the program. I think that if we are to get the more hesitant types to jump on board, we need to have some specific data. I know that we have lots of data but, again, is it cause and effect data? I'm hopeful because of the work that you are doing, but we have to live with what you tell us. I expect

*that to be, "This is what I hear. This is what I see,."
etc. If it is positive stuff, that is going to be helpful to
us in getting more people involved and moving this
thing forward. Not to put any pressure on whoever
is writing the report because it has to be candid and
honest about what it is hearing, seeing, and doing.
Then we also have to know if it isn't working to try to
dissect what is not working. Why isn't it working? Do
we care if it is working or not? If it isn't, what are we
going to do about it…? Our public, our stakeholders
know that we are continuing to evaluate how we are
doing in our programs…They have some confidence
that we are being accountable, and we are serving the
public in the best way we can as we do our work. I
think I can make the same parallels for the CPI.*

The evaluator worked closely with the CPI Evaluation
Advisory Committee to develop interview and focus
group questions. Staff from the Community Founda-
tion of Greater South Wood County (CFGSWC) and
the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alli-
ance (HOW) identified people for the focus groups and
interviews. Finally, the evaluator was able to make use
of previous evaluations and reports, particularly those
written by Judy Millesen, and the April 2004 – March
2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report compiled by staff.
This information was useful in developing the initial
data collection instruments and the community conver-
sation elements, and in the overall analysis and develop-
ment of this report

Data Collection

The study collected new data in three ways. First, the
evaluator conducted 14 organized focus groups and one
spontaneous focus group. See Appendix 4 for details on
focus group themes and participation. Several of these
sessions were larger than the ideal focus group size; oth-
ers were smaller. Secondly, 23 people were interviewed
in 20 interviews.Those interviews included six business
representatives, five municipal leaders, and five who live
outside the community yet were involved in some way
with CPI. The five non-community member interviews
provided an outside perspective to complement the views
of those who live and work in the area (see Appendix 5).
Finally, the focus groups included both staff and joint

board members. This approach allowed the evaluator to
collect data on the views of those involved on a day-to-
day basis, as well as those involved at the policy level, to
supplement and balance the data collected from partici-
pants and community leaders.

Staff from the CFGSWC and HOW identified people for
the focus groups and interviews, including participants
from the various CPI-sponsored programs, as well as
local leaders and others from outside the community
who contributed to CPI in some way. These data were
reviewed to identify key themes and then analyzed using
those themes. Third, data was reviewed to determine
key findings, conclusions, and areas of disagreement that
could be incorporated into the Community Conversa-
tions. Six conversations were held; attendance was small
in general, and two sessions had no participants.

Limitations

This report supplements existing reports on CPI with
findings derived from collecting qualitative data. These
data allowed the evaluator to delve deeper into what
makes CPI work, to look for the reasons why things
work, and to capture opinions on next steps. It does
not allow us to draw conclusions about what commu-
nity members in general think about CPI. Indeed, we
did not interview any opponents of CPI, although our
interview list included several friendly critics as well as
several people perceived to oppose CPI. In addition, no
one showed up for the focus group with elected leaders,
although at least five of the interviewees were elected
officials. We made several attempts to include key infor-
mants from the Hmong and Native American commu-
nity but were unsuccessful in making the connection. In
this case, the grounded theory approach to data collec-
tion, which suggests interviewing people until no new
critical information emerges, gives us some confidence
that our sample of focus group participants and inter-
viewees was sufficient to gather key ideas as we reached
a point in the interview process where we heard no new
ideas from the respondents.

Study Findings

This section reports on results of the study. Overall, there was strong congruence in the interviews and focus groups with three exceptions. In two cases, negative comments about the CPI appeared to be somewhat focused on personnel rather than on CPI. In the other case, the respondent provided well thought out criticisms and questions related to CPI itself. First, data related to the CPI overall outcomes is analyzed followed by a look at critical elements of CPI, specific program results, key drivers of CPI and participant recommendations.

CPI's Overall Effects/Outcomes

CPI set out to make a difference in three ways: develop a prosperous, diverse local economy; build a strong, positive local community; and create an innovative, entrepreneurial and self-reliant culture. CPI leaders sought to accomplish these goals by focusing on commitment, capacity, and structure. When asked about the most significant change emerging from CPI, respondents gave us a wide range of answers. Generally people's responses fell into four key areas:

1. Changes in attitudes, particularly in regard to taking responsibility, focusing on the positive and accepting the idea of change.
2. More people engaged in finding and implementing solutions.
3. Development of more trust in the community and among groups.
4. More collaboration among community organizations and government entities.

Using the three key goals of CPI, this section describes specific intended outcomes and impacts resulting from CPI efforts and the results of the evalution in regard to these intended outcomes.

1. Develop a prosperous, diverse local economy. CPI and HOW-specific outcomes key to this goal include:

CPI Outcomes:
- To create an innovative, self-reliant, and business-friendly culture in a vibrant community with a prosperous local economy.
- To create a business-friendly environment and empower entrepreneurs.
- To stimulate new enterprises resulting in additional job opportunities.

HOW Outcomes:
- To create awareness of available resources and disseminate knowledge to help business owners launch and expand economic opportunities.
- To promote networking and collaboration among area businesses to boost the local economy.

Evaluation results on this goal were more mixed than those of other goals. On the one hand, respondents felt that the climate was much more business friendly and that the local culture has changed to be more supportive of those who seek to establish their own enterprises. Only two respondents indicated they felt there had been no change in the climate; one did not know, and two others felt it was still very early to tell. During a focus group, a new small business owner commented on the fact that before CPI, she would never have considered starting a business, and others in the group provided similar examples. Seven interviewees specifically mentioned the importance of entrepreneurship. This increased openness toward entrepreneurship reflects findings in Millesen's report where she commented that she did not find as much evidence of fear of failing or fear of competition (2008: 38).

On the other hand, four respondents specifically mentioned the need for a "big win." To some extent, these reactions were related to the fact that the area continues to shed jobs in large numbers as additional plants close and down size. And, the Wisconsin Rapids area has not successfully attracted businesses like other nearby communities better situated on key highways. In contrast the development of new jobs in the small business sec-

Table 1: Business Development Outcomes

Activity	Participants	Business start ups	Jobs created	Jobs retained	Expansion/ start up financing
Entrepreneurial Boot Camps	112	42			21
Clusters**	153	30	245	77	
Business Innovation Series	121	160	1573*		
Totals	**386**	**232**	**1818**	**77**	**21**

*   Reported as jobs added to the economy.

** The term cluster is used in the CPI logic model, outcomes report, and other CPI documentation to indicate formal networks of businesses and related nonprofits and government entities organized around a particular industry or economic activity (New Economy Cluster, Arts and Heritage Cluster).

tor occurs in smaller, less noticeable numbers. Several respondents requested clear numbers on CPI impact on jobs and a better understanding of cause and effect. "Is CPI claiming jobs that would have happened anyway?" This concern also appeared in Millesen's study, as her informants expressed concerns about the documentation that showed CPI played a role in business growth (2008: 36). Staff collected a great deal of data on the related CPI programs, which is in Table 1.

Millesen (2008: 38) also reported that an obstacle for CPI in relation to key goals is that, "people refuse to believe that a new economy can be built by expanding small businesses. The only things that counted were business-attraction strategies and quantifiable results" (2008: 36). The evaluator heard echoes of this position when respondents described their hopes that CPI and HOW would successfully attract a large employer who could add 500 jobs to the community.

In summary, the CPI April 2004–March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report demonstrates that CPI has been successful in starting businesses and creating and retaining jobs. It has succeeded by fostering a more supportive environment that empowers entrepreneurs to act on their dreams, by providing support and education, and by creating networks that support innovation and entrepreneurship. CPI and HOW have demonstrated and acted on a commitment to entrepreneurial growth and have encouraged the community to commit support to entrepreneurs. Through the development of programs, activities, and networks, CPI and HOW have also developed local capacity to support entrepreneurship. The resulting structure of programs and support aids entrepreneurs and those who support them in working together, finding the resources they need, and visualizing success.

2. Build a strong, positive local community. Overwhelmingly, people responded positively to questions related to how things have changed both in terms of possibilities and in the local capacity and leadership to make change. Related outcomes include:

CPI Goals:
- To shape a shared vision for people throughout the region.
- To build the area's charitable assets to support sustainable community development and foster self-reliance.
- To motivate emerging young leaders to drive positive change.

HOW Outcomes:
- To expand community leadership.

CFGSWC Outcomes:
- To support community improvement opportunities and leverage outside resources.
- To build community assets to ensure long-term investment in community needs.

In seeking to understand how CPI has contributed to a strong, positive local community, respondents often mentioned the launch, visioning and goal setting activities; the expansion of leadership training and service opportunities; and the role of CFGSWC in increasing the understanding of, and participation in, philanthropy. Many people mentioned the launch activities as key to building the momentum and the commitment needed to find ways to strengthen local communities and the area.

Community Progress Teams and Progress Fund Committees were also mentioned, and while some Community Progress Teams/Progress Fund Committees have been more active than others, all have taken some action to better their communities, and see CPI as critical to this new sense of urgency. These findings are supportive of Millesen's comments that people attributed success "to the breadth of community involvement and an overt expectation that people will look internally for solutions" (Millesen et al., 2008: 34).

Although our questions did not specifically focus on the CFGSWC, respondents and focus group participants commented on matching grants as a tool to build local funds and to engage community people in raising funds.

Both focus group participants and interviewees felt strongly that CPI has led to stronger, more positive communities, specifically in regard to:

- Focusing on the positive.
- Identifying and working from area strengths.
- Providing the support and context for people to envision a more positive future for their communities and the area.

The evaluator heard many positive comments about the expansion in leadership training opportunities and the impact of these opportunities on the community. Respondents felt that CPI has not only provided more and better opportunities for leadership development but has also impacted how people feel about leadership and leaders. One person, for example, mentioned that people were less afraid that running for office might negatively impact their businesses. Just as Millesen et al. (2007) found that leadership was being redefined from agenda setting to being "inclusive, facilitative and empowering" (p. 27), the evaluator also heard comments on the importance of replacing traditional roles and views of leadership with more inclusive and collaborative approaches.

Based on the data collected, the Community Progress Initiative has succeeded in creating a structure that continues to support efforts to build stronger, more positive communities. A variety of programs, structures and processes provide opportunities for developing strong relationships among leaders, CPI and the broader community. In the interviews and focus groups, people talked about CPI in terms of providing a structure, a process and support for the clusters to be successful. Others referred to CPI as a platform that allows people to bring forth their ideas for open discussion. These comments come from the experience of people involved in the Progress Fund Committees, the clusters and Boot Camps, and the leadership programs. Thus, these findings mirror Millesen et al. (2007) who saw the CFGSWC and HOW (Millesen, 2008) as catalysts to unleash a grassroots effort to bring about meaningful change. Some respondents also asked for help in developing a better understanding of the structure and identifying opportunities to get more support.

3. Create an innovative, entrepreneurial, and self reliant culture. Many people commented on how ways of thinking and doing have changed within the community. Related outcomes include:

CPI Goals:
- To inspire community spirit and pride.

HOW Outcomes:
- To expand community leadership.

CFGSWC Outcomes:
- To support community improvement opportunities and leverage outside resources.

In regard to changes in attitude, three areas stand out:

1. Changing the norm regarding collaboration by successfully modeling collaborative approaches, engaging local leaders in discussion about collaboration during the Advanced Leadership Institute, and creating opportunities for collaborative work in program activities such as the clusters, Community Progress Teams and Progress Fund Committees, and other activities.

2. Moving people from an ethic of dependency to one of empowerment. Many people commented on understanding that community people have to work together to make a better future for themselves and their families. Millesen et al. (2007) described one

"aspect of the cultural shift was a general openness to asking for help and learning from others" (p. 41).

3. Reframing current and past situations from needs and deficiencies to focusing on assets, positive community characteristics, solutions and opportunities

CPI has had a major impact on how participants frame and reframe their thinking, moving from a frame of dependency and despair to one of hope and self-reliance. CPI offered people a way to act on their caring for community and thus successfully mobilized many people to participate. Indeed, when asked about the most significant change, people most often mentioned changes in attitudes, ways of thinking and doing, trust, collaboration, empowerment and engagement; only a few mentioned economic indicators.

Millesen et al. reported on a fear that CPI would create a new sense of dependency and become a new "old boy's network," concentrating on power rather than focusing on community building. Some respondents, particularly those connected to Community Progress Teams/Progress Fund Committees, indicated a need for more help from CPI. Given the relative lack of capacity to make change in those communities, the evaluator interprets this data as not so much illustrating a new sense of dependency, but rather as recognition of the need to build more local capacity in those committees. The evaluator found no evidence that CPI has created a new sense of dependency—that "someone else will take care of me," yet people do depend on CPI to access resources and to provide a platform for change-related work. In this sense CPI is more a vehicle for change and less a controller of change.

Critical Elements of CPI

As is often the case, participants' view of CPI are akin to the 'blind man and the elephant.' Those involved in one aspect of the project may have little or no knowledge of other program elements. Some programs, however, were mentioned often by many people. This section briefly describes these programs, comments on why people thought they were important, and links them to the overall outcomes.

The Launch and Follow-up Community Meetings

The initial launch activities involving 515 people and resulting in 32 additional events and 27 projects (April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report) were mentioned by many people. Those involved in the Community Progress Teams/Progress Fund Committees were most likely to also mention the follow-up meetings. These efforts laid the ground work for future CPI work by engaging citizens, creating local visions of the future to guide community work, providing an alternative way of framing the situation—including both possibilities and challenges, and offering a model of how people might work together to achieve those visions. These activities were critical to engaging people in CPI, demonstrating that all the communities are important to CPI success, and creating tangible results in the form of festivals, fund raising and other activities.

The Clusters and Related Activities

The CPI logic model and other documentation identify the development of clusters or formal networking opportunities that bring related businesses and other agencies together to stimulate additional business activity as a key strategy to increase jobs and businesses. Many respondents talked about the importance of the clusters in bringing people together. They also mentioned that CPI brought structure, support and a focus to this work so that people could experience the value of networking and build trust.

Those participating in the clusters also spoke about subsequent study tours that helped them think outside the box and see new possibilities. The formation of the Arts and Heritage Cluster was a tangible outcome that occurred directly as a result of the study tour to North Carolina inspiring participants to take what they were learning about the arts and heritage as a driver for economic development and create a vehicle for that work in the Wisconsin Rapids area. In addition to supporting job and business growth, the clusters draw from multiple communities which results in more regional thinking.

Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI)

In addition to respondents' comments on participating in the ALI, the evaluator also heard a number of comments on the impact of ALI in encouraging collaboration, particularly among government entities. By engaging municipal and other leaders in class discussions around adaptive management, ALI was successful in initiating change in both the practice and understanding of collaboration for those who attended. These graduates were able to take these ideas back to their communities, agencies, and organizations and use them to begin initiating real change, particularly in supporting collaborative efforts across municipalities and agencies. In addition to specific ALI outcomes, the class projects also have had an impact on the community.

Speak Your Peace (SYP)

SYP is a citizen-led effort that replicated a project created by the Duluth Superior Community Foundation which was observed during a study tour. Although this program was launched in March 2008 as a citizen-led project, it was mentioned by many people as having an impact on how people work together. With increased civility, problems can be dealt with in a reasonable fashion. While CPI and ALI gave leaders a vision for collaboration and an appreciation of the potential benefits, with SYP they also found a tool to move the vision to action.

Entrepreneurial Boot Camps

Only a few of those interviewed had actually participated in the Entrepreneurial Boot Camps, yet this program was mentioned often as an effective strategy to encourage more entrepreneurship and help entrepreneurs be more successful. The Entrepreneurial Boot Camps provide a way for people to enter the entrepreneurial pipeline. From the 112 attending, 42 new businesses have started (April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report). Graduates not only acquire new knowledge and skills to aid them in their enterprise development, they also have access to a network that can support them.

Teen Leadership

Only two people were not convinced that engaging young people in CPI is critical to the future. While many people felt this is an area where CPI could do more, others commented on the value of this program in connecting kids to their community and across communities and in helping young people find a way to be actively involved in shaping the future. Young people who participated in the focus group activity were also highly enthusiastic about the program and eager to expand their participation in community betterment activities.

Analysis of Specific Programs and Activities

The results of data analysis on the various programs and foci of the Community Progress Initiative follow.

Launch and Rallies

All those who participated in a launch activity had positive comments. They were appreciative of the efforts to bring people together and spoke highly of the process. The kick-off and subsequent visioning activities speak to the ability of CPI leaders to plan and manage strategically. In addition to the positive comments the evaluator heard about the rallies and visioning sessions, as well as requests for another launch-like activity to rekindle enthusiasm and bring new people into the work, several respondents suggested that a new round of engagement activities focus as well on celebrating successes.

Entrepreneurial Development, Including Technical Assistance, Mentoring, Business Seminars and Angel Investors

Generally, only those who had participated in seminars or requested additional services were able to comment. Respondents appreciated the use of local business service vendors as resources in classes, the Entrepreneurial Boot Camps and other activities. Local vendors reported picking up additional business, and participants liked getting to know the vendor before approaching them as a client. Participants commented that the programs were well designed and provided useful information.

Over 570 people participated in some kind of activity leading to 1,085 new business contacts, 60 start-ups/expansions, and 1,573 jobs added to the economy. Only one respondent talked about angel investors. Data from the April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report indicates that CPI has involved 11 investors, leading to two start-ups and one expansion that added 37 jobs to the economy (April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report). A few respondents felt that the system of technical assistance, training and mentoring could be better marketed so people would realize the breadth of programs and assistance available.

Much of the data from the April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report was very supportive of the CPI efforts to create jobs and businesses, yet a small but significant number of people talked about the need for a "big win" by attracting a large employer. CPI has focused economic development efforts primarily on growing local jobs and businesses in contrast to many economic development agencies that concentrate on attraction. Increasingly, studies on economic development approaches conclude that for many communities, the return on investment is higher when resources are primarily focused on growing your own, and the same activities that lead to a stronger local economy also make the community more attractive to outside investors. Current work on business development has focused on the need for entrepreneurial development systems that create a pipeline for bringing entrepreneurs into the support system. Data analysis attests to CPI's success in implementing the five components of an Entrepreneurial Development System as described by the Aspen Institute (2007: 8):

- *Entrepreneurial education.* Currently, CPI supports an Entrepreneurial Boot Camp at Nekoosa Academy; it is also an area where people want to see more activity. They see entrepreneurship as a way to encourage young people to stay in or return to the community.
- *Adult entrepreneurship training and technical assistance.* HOW has developed a sophisticated system of education and technical assistance that draws in the private sector as well. People have multiple avenues for entering the entrepreneurial pipeline and can access services anywhere along the pipeline.

- *Access to capital.* Entrepreneurs have several avenues to pursue in regard to accessing capital. In addition, several people are interested in developing Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) that could provide start-up capital to prospective entrepreneurs. Finally, CPI has created a network of angel investors.
- *Access to networks.* CPI has supported various clusters that have been very successful in networking entrepreneurs and with other services.
- *Entrepreneurial culture.* Many respondents talked about changes in attitudes, and both a buy local and local foods effort are in place.

The Aspen Report also lists nine principles that should guide an Entrepreneurial Development System (EDS) including:
- Entrepreneur-focused
- Inclusive of all types of entrepreneurs
- Asset-based
- Collaborative
- Comprehensive and integrated
- Community-based – but regional focused
- Linked and informing local and state economic development policy
- Sustainable
- Focused on continuous improvement

Our data supports the fact that CPI adheres to these nine principles.

Entrepreneurial Boot Camps

Those who had participated in one of the 10 Boot Camps or had friends or family involved spoke highly of the Boot Camp experience and felt CPI should continue offering them. Participants liked the short intense timeframe because they felt it made it easier to juggle all their scheduling challenges. Others commented on the value of family members attending together. They also appreciated working through the business planning process, the opportunity to work on their business plan at the Boot Camp, and the chance to meet other entrepreneurs in similar situations and potential business service providers. Participants also reported the Boot Camps are well-organized and staffed. One interviewee was critical of the claim that participants could develop a full business plan

during the weekend. Others focused on the value of getting a significant start on their business plan.

Industry Clusters

Next to the leadership programs, people commented most on the clusters. At least eight of the interviewees participated in one cluster and several participated in more than one. As each cluster depends on the leadership and motivation of those attending, people reported a range of effectiveness. Several spoke specifically to the amount of new business contacts, primarily local business, they received as a result of participating. Others talked about the opportunity to share new ideas and to listen to those of other participants. Both the Manufacturing Cluster and the Citizens for a Clean, Green and Welcoming Community [often referred to as the Go Green Cluster] received the most positive comments. Respondents not only see Citizens for a Clean, Green and Welcoming Community as a new focus for business growth but also as a way to bring more and younger voices to the table. Others see Citizens for a Clean, Green and Welcoming Community as a way for local residents and communities to address recycling and landfill issues.

One respondent spoke of the lack of action in her cluster, but also talked about how she was able to get people focused and accomplish some goals. Some concern was expressed about the Downtown Cluster in regard to development possibilities. A total of 153 people participated and reported on 30 new business start-ups or expansions, 247 new jobs, 77 retained jobs, and 57 projects. Sixty-four cluster members participated in study tours (April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report). A respondent working in a cluster commented,

> I think that people were allowed to come up with their own thinking about where they wanted to see things go for that particular cluster, and that was helpful. Certainly, we had a common mission statement for the CPI that we were all aware of and were working on. But there was a great deal of latitude for the cluster groups to kind of go on, and I think that generates creativity…There are two kinds of support. One is support for the bigger picture, a support to keep pushing us to do more

> and better and to be accountable in that way for what we were doing. So that is very important. The other support is just structural support from the people of the Heart of Wisconsin, where they are keeping notes, getting the minutes out, all of those kinds of things that made it easy for a volunteer to do the work, or easier I should stay. Maybe a better word than easy is possible. They made it possible for a volunteer to do the work.

New Ideas! Speaker Series

Many respondents had attended one or more of the nine programs that drew 1,096 people (April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report). With several exceptions, those who commented found the speakers interesting and the opportunity to hear a different perspective useful. One person expressed concern about the expense of these programs and thought using more local people would be a better use of the funds. Several people felt there should be a stronger emphasis on CPI participants making presentations to local groups and churches about the programs and activities and their participation in them.

Leadership Programs

CPI has done a great job of addressing the need for community leadership. The evaluator heard strong testimonials on the value of three primary leadership development programs: Teen Leadership, HOW Community Leadership, and the Advanced Leadership Institute. Informally, these programs interact with other CPI components as participants in other efforts also participate in the leadership development programs. Respondents suggested that these programs could be stronger by formally linking them as community leadership opportunities with clear pathways among them and joint marketing. Other respondents spoke to the need for formal succession planning to operate in conjunction with leadership recruitment and training. Graduates are recruited to participate in planning the next sessions. People mentioned the increasing difficulty in getting volunteers and the need to prepare for generational change among informal and formal leaders as challenges leaders must be prepared to act on. The

CPI April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report indicates that 131 people participated in the HOW Community Leadership, 40 in ALI, and 49 in Teen Leadership (April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report).

For the programs that include a retreat, participants talked about the retreat activity as a way for people to get to know others and build trust. Several specifically spoke to the importance of trust building as a key outcome of the leadership programs. Others expressed concern about the cost of participation in the HOW leadership program and the subsequent need for scholarships in order to make the program more inclusive. Comments about the program include:

> *The importance of relationships—knowing the community, so many more people I feel comfortable talking with...Recognize we can influence... Helps us figure out who to work with...I may not do as much I would like…it opens the door so I can participate.*

> *I am much less critical of someone else knowing how hard everyone is working. People in municipalities, all the people involved are much less critical. We have a better understanding. I wouldn't jump to conclusions now. We are very comfortable to say there is lot to do and directing to them to something.*

> *The last day of leadership was the kick-off we needed to change the conversation in our community. People involved can change the conversation and can direct someone else to the positive talk—not the negative…to use real data and information to change the conversations.*

> *The weekend retreat got me out of my comfort zone. The retreat was the net-working driver and is one component that breaks down all the stuff right away. It sets up rules of engagement for the program.*

> *Programming—the steering committee and advisory committee touch on as many systems as possible and bring in key people who know the system. I felt honored.*

> *The corporate sponsorship of the program…if Solaris doesn't do it…without their funding, a lot wouldn't happen.*

Youth Programs

The CPI April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report (p. 98) indicates that 1,500 youth participated in Community Committees, Leadership Training, Industry Clusters, the Nekoosa Academy Boot Camp, and other activities. Despite this number, most respondents felt that more needs to be done to support youth participation. In contrast, two people felt that focusing on young people should not be a priority.

> *I think it has been fairly extensive. As we have talked about youth, and I have talked to some of our youth here…they have really been pleased with their role in the youth leadership program, and they have suggested that we have more students be involved next year. That is a good thing. We have had young people be involved in the leadership program for the Heart of Wisconsin, which was in existence before the CPI. It certainly is a complimentary program to the CPI. Then with the Advanced Leadership Institute, people young and old have been involved in that program. So, that has been a good thing, and I think in terms of the entrepreneurship, the numbers of people who have attended Entrepreneurial Boot Camps and the numbers who have struck out on their own to create some small business opportunities has been impressive for a community of this size.*

> *Wisconsin has one of the worst rates of kids going off to secondary education and one of the worst rates for people returning to the state.*

> *I know at the beginning of the initiative meetings …they tried to get young people more involved. To be truthfully honest, I don't know what ever became of that.*

Young people in the focus groups were interested in increased opportunities to participate. They identified seven key factors that made the Teen Leadership program successful:

- Meet new people.
- Gain confidence.
- Speak more in front of others.
- Enjoyable experience—find ways to make things better.
- Fun and active.
- Comfortable with others.
- Appreciate diversity.

The group also identified what they felt were the most significant changes emerging from the program; they included:
- Young people are more willing to talk with others.
- Helps us be authentic.
- Schools get kids more involved.
- Adults treat us as adults, not kids. (Considered very significant change.)
- Other communities see us as an example. (Considered most significant change.)
- We are more civil.
- Young people are accepted and involved in solutions.
- Be an example for each other.

Ideas from the group about successes and factors contributing to those successes include:
- Community project—everyone was involved; felt we were making a difference; got to work with people from different environments (disabilities); voiced my opinion.
- Community tours—learning about various things in community.
- Gained confidence to help get a job; made me talk more.
- Representation from four high schools led to friendships, more confidence to speak in front of people, inclusivity and finding common ground.
- Courthouse session—The Hearing—gave me a reason to never be in court and have 26 kids watching. It would be embarrassing.
- Jeopardy game—each person brings something different to the table, everyone is knowledgeable about different things. See things through other person's view.

In addition to meeting with Teen Leadership participants, the evaluator also met with young people from the Nekoosa Academy. These students had participated in an Entrepreneurial Boot Camp which they felt was very helpful in increasing confidence and speaking skills. They also made suggestions for getting business owners with "more interesting" businesses to attend. Students also appreciated the opportunity to help with community events. They all planned to go on for additional training to secure jobs, and some thought there might be an opportunity for them to be entrepreneurs in the future. The Nekoosa Academy interaction with CPI also included securing funds to start a school-based enterprise. However, this program has yet to be launched for a number of reasons. Launching this program could make a significant difference to these young people's understanding of, and interest in, entrepreneurship.

The evaluator also asked participants how the program might become better. They suggested more opportunities to get together, having each community do a project in their own community, or perhaps do a project in a different community. They also thought it was important to have graduates present information on the program to the middle schools. Some expressed a desire to meet outside of class one time per month and thought the group could initiate the 'get together' themselves, perhaps focusing on a small project. Overall, they wanted to see more opportunities for youth participation in CPI and in the community in general. They reminded us that, "Young people can be involved, too!" and that, "Young people are the future."

In response to the question, what can CPI do better, we got these additional suggestions:
- Need more youth-oriented activities for kids to do on Friday night.
- Find ways for youth to hear about CPI through the schools.

Speak Your Peace (SYP)

This citizen-led effort replicates an existing program created by the Duluth Superior Community Foundation. A relatively new program, SYP grew out of an ALI leadership class project and study tour. Many

respondents expressed concerned about the lack of civility in public settings, and saw SYP as a way to address that concern. The vast majority of interviewees believe that SYP has made a significant difference in the community; several feel that it is too soon to comment on its impact. Two people felt there was no impact, and one was very negative about the program. Most hoped that SYP would expand, particularly into the schools.

…from what I've heard on the street, it's everywhere now. It's spreading like wildfire.

…would have to classify it as a total flop. To me it is totally unexciting, and it is kind of like a "We should…" The reaction on the street is, "Don't 'should' on me." It is just preachy, and I really don't think it is going anywhere.

I did talk to …at the Community Foundation and I was real enthused about it. She said that they are getting tremendously good input from people on it. It's just that, to me, it is very, very basic. It is good, like the Ten Commandments, but what relation does this have to CPI?

I saw people catch themselves saying something that would not add to a positive outcome or conflict resolution and then say, "Oh, I'm really sorry. That was not a constructive way to say what I really think. Let me try it again."

Experiential Learning Study Tours

The seven Study Tours that involved 84 people (April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes, 2007) received positive comments both in terms of the opportunities to see and learn, but also in the value of the time spent traveling together. Several respondents felt there was an opportunity to focus more on local Study Tours, so more people might attend. They also suggested that CPI needs to get even better at inviting people to participate. They also suggested that those who attend give more presentations, so others understand the value. Comments include:

It's a little different perspective and so I understand how it works for people. [We see the] growth people go through…particularly overnight with people they have not been in contact with, learning how to travel with people and learn a huge amount. That was why we were adamant about including study tours as part of the initiative initially.

All on the bus together, that was really key. I know of others that took their own car. I don't think they would have the same experience.

Whole new level of discussion, where people go with their innovative thinking…

Importance of invitation …you have skills and this is for you.

I have a thought for tours and clusters. HOW needs more staffing as things grow, like the Buy Local and Go Green [Clusters] take off; it puts a strain on staff.

Community Progress Teams and Progress Fund Committees

Community Progress Teams/Progress Fund Committees emerged from the launches and visioning sessions and involved thousands of individuals. When asked about their experience with the Community Progress Teams and Progress Fund Committees, many had positive things to say about what the groups had accomplished.

Progress Team in Vesper has dropped off, but that's okay. Official membership has dropped off but other people have stepped up to fulfill the needs of the community. People just don't like to go to meetings. Community Progress work has spread. Celebrate Vesper Day now has churches and nonprofits involved. Vesper has stepped up as a community and…has been able to let some of the responsibility go to others. Farmers Market specifically has been taken from the Welcoming Committee to the farmers themselves to create and put up signs.

Seven Progress Fund Committees focused on raising money for the matching grant, identified over 669 local donors, and expanded awareness of and interest in philanthropic giving (April 2004 – March 2007 Cumulative Outcomes Report). These committees received staff support from CFGSWC. One focus group expressed a concern that some Progress Fund Committees haven't received many requests from the community.

The Community Progress Teams were charged with actualizing the vision that came from the community launch sessions, yet without the staffing support accorded to other components, the achievements of these teams are mixed. Some were remarkably successful; others floundered. The evaluator heard from several sources that they feel there is a need to reconnect and revitalize their Teams.

In some areas, the Community Progress Teams and Progress Fund Committees appear to have merged. In others, the Progress Teams have had difficulty recruiting volunteers. Focus group participants discussed the need for more support and structure. Several also mentioned the need to reconnect, revisit mission and goals, and set new goals. A number of people described difficulties in recruiting volunteers, as people are so very busy these days. Factors contributing to success include: building of trust and relationships, structure and support from CPI, the opportunity to bring people together and engage them, and access to funding. Key comments from the Focus groups include:

The future of Progress Team depends on the ability to attract new volunteers.

Process is more significant than events; the process brings collective groups of people together…a contagious process and leads to spin-off events. Having a framework in place that allows people to become involved [is important].

People saw things happening, and people were drawn to that.

Well organized energetic leadership, which this community has lacked for two or three hundred years.

The voice that has sprung from the process… people that didn't realize they had a voice…they have been granted it. People are getting involved. When people have that ability, they are much more willing to share.

Vision statements—having individual groups form their very own vision statement and compare with others—[seeing] that there is common ground. The event of seeing the vision statements with common elements [was good]; they are unique, but not separate.

The whole Progress Initiative movement has developed an element of trust with people involved that I have not seen before; people have really trusted each other. Trust is important to get ahead.

Key Drivers of CPI's Success

This section focuses on the key drivers behind CPI successes, particularly in regard to the role of lead partners, collaboration, and community readiness, including information on critical components of CPI success.

With one exception all interviewees believe that CPI has earned credibility and legitimacy, has successfully buffered very difficult times with repeated layoffs, has developed a high level of community trust in CPI, and has weathered difficult political struggles. Despite these struggles, CPI remains a strong advocate for community and economic development, civic engagement and civil discourse.

If I had to point out anything, it was the way in which the connections were made between organizations, between individuals, between ideas and between practices. I really think that has been the hallmark of the whole initiative, that connecting things and making people understand that it is all related. If you want your community to be transformed, everything and everyone counts.

When asked about the key drivers of CPI success, many interviewees mentioned the leadership of CPI, the need or urgency for action, the collaboration among agencies, and shared vision as factors that contributed to the success of the effort.

It was how could they improve the civic capital in their community at a time of great adversity…? It wasn't just the economic loss. It was a sense of dependency that had grown up over time because of what I call the benign benevolence of the families that had run the town.

Role of Lead Organizations

Respondents often mentioned the important role of the collaborating partners and the leadership and vision of the CEOs of each. In this respect, our findings are similar to those in Millesen et al.'s study (2007) on the importance of the unique role of CFGSWC to engage members of the community, to lead strategic community-based efforts, to play a leadership role by stimulating and coordinating philanthropic giving and thus play a key role in building community stability and empowerment." In addition to providing overall leadership, HOW has also successfully focused on growing jobs and businesses (Millesen, 2008).

A few comments were made on the relationship between the partners and the need for more transparency in understanding how CPI works.

My only concern, a little bit, is the coordination between the two. I have wondered if that has been as tight as it could be. I don't see any duplication of that work but I'm not sure how shared it is so that everybody feels comfortable with the investment each of those organizations are making.

Role of Collaboration

Eighteen interviewees specifically commented on the importance of collaboration, and many suggested the need to expand collaborative efforts in the area, particularly in regard to collaboration across governmental jurisdictions and agencies. The Advanced Leadership Institute in particular, but other programs as well, has built connections and created new stocks of bridging and bonding social capital. The collaborating organizations have also played a role in encouraging attention to diversity and finding ways to encourage participation, yet people feel there is more work to do here by bringing

in the faith-based community, the social services sector, reaching out to diverse populations, and perhaps finding ways to partner with unions. Finally, all interview respondents agreed that working across sectors—economic, philanthropic and civic—was essential to CPI success.

All I can say is that that is crucial to the success of CPI; that we are able to work across and communicate across all sectors—public, nonprofit, businesses large and small, government agencies and other agencies. It has brought people together to talk differently about how things work. That is a good thing. If things are going to happen, that is going to have to continue, it seems to me.

Community Readiness

Many spoke about the conditions and events that led to the creation of CPI. The dramatic decline in jobs and the sense that the "good times" would never return created an urgency for doing something different. CPI was able to capitalize on the growing demand for something to happen.

I wanted to get involved because I was convinced that if we are going to be able at all to compete here in our community with other communities in the upper Midwest, we needed to do something different because there are so many communities with economic challenges that just to do what everybody else is doing wasn't going to make a difference...Plus, there were some uniquenesses. I found the initiative intriguing to me. The biggest draw to me was when I came to the understanding that it was about a three-pronged approach, being leadership development, community development and economic development. That just made all kinds of sense to me.

Additional Critical Components

The evaluator identified four underlying components that respondents mentioned as critical to CPI success.

Successful Motivation and Involvement: Respondents participated in a wide variety of activities and events.

Many of the people the evaluator talked with were involved in more than one ongoing activity, yet several were very focused in one area such as Industry-Related Clusters. Others were involved at the community level and somewhat unclear on the connection to the overall CPI strategy.

Overall people became involved in CPI for several different reasons. First, and foremost, people talked about being asked to be involved. Many also mentioned that they had played a leadership or volunteer role in the community and saw CPI as a way to continue to contribute. Others talked about the urgency for action brought on by the tough economic times. Some became involved as part of a professional role or an activity sanctioned by their employer. A number of people mentioned the willingness of people to participate, to give of their time and talent, to take action and to make commitments to support CPI. Finally, others responded to the advertising of events or activities.

Enhanced Communication: Respondents indicated that the initiative has improved communication among and within communities, and many commented on the number of emails they receive. One person thought there were too many emails. Overall people felt that the ongoing communication is critical to CPI success, and they provided suggestions for improving communications.

Structure for Action: Beyond the leadership, urgency and vision, respondents commented on the structure and process developed by CPI as being key to incubating and nurturing successful change efforts:

> *One is that we were given a structure. All of us were volunteers so there was good development for those of us leaders. We weren't told, "OK, you've got an idea. Just do it," but, "You've got an idea. Here is a process. Here is a structure."*

> *Process is more significant than events; the process brings collective groups of people together that would not have come together; it's a contagious process and leads to spin-off events…having a framework in place that allows people to become involved.*

> *[There were a] number of different ways that people could get involved. Programs were put in place that allowed them to get involved. It was a springboard.*

Resource Acquisition and Management: The evaluator was asked to garner perceptions of CPI's use of resources. Respondents were thrilled to learn of new investments in CPI, from the Ford Foundation in particular. Many, primarily board and staff, mentioned the importance of the Barker and Mead family support. In response to a question on wise use of resources, the vast majority of interviewees believe that resources, particularly grants and staff time, have been used wisely. Several indicated they didn't know. One was emphatic that resources were not used wisely and commented on money that staff spent taking trips. Another felt that there was too much money spent on bringing outside speakers in, particularly when those resources could be used to seed a local speaker's bureau.

> *Certainly the resources of the Community Foundation and the Heart of Wisconsin have been essential to it and the grants that they have been able to put together.*

> *Don't know about wisely. They have had a lot of events…worked hard to meet the needs of people— rah-rah—and to think positively about the community…way too many of them. Don't know what they all cost. The most valuable institution/activity is the leadership.*

Summary

Data collected in the evaluation provide evidence of CPI's success in building capacity. The initiative has committed to making changes and has successfully engaged community members in that work. Respondents described a new mindfulness about the community and its potential; staff described their abilities and willingness to persevere; and across the board, respondents provided evidence of aspiring to greater successes from their conviction that positive change is possible and their determination to act on that conviction.

Virtually all those interviewed agreed that successful community change efforts require a broad focus. They indicated that the synergy generated by initiative activities in different areas was very important to CPI success. "You don't always reach the 'little' people if you don't go the full, broad spectrum." The evaluator also heard many testimonials that people feel ownership of the projects and activities. The existence of a larger vision, an ideology that focuses on community assets, and a commitment by people to take their destiny into their own hands, was also mentioned. Yet, most are still actors in the play rather than stage directors or playwrights, and thus depend on CPI staff for direction, resources and new inputs.

Study Participants' Recommendations

This section briefly summarizes respondents' comments in regard to the future of CPI.

Should CPI Continue?

Overwhelmingly respondents feel strongly about how CPI has worked toward creating a positive future for the community. As a major focus of the evaluation, the question, "What next?" elicited intense opinions about what should happen next. The majority felt that CPI should continue and expand; a small minority offered comments related to the idea that initiatives only last for awhile, and it is time for CPI to morph into a movement. One person felt CPI has lived out its usefulness.

To be the vehicle or impetus, they have to continue …the whole thing is like a hub and as they network out and reach out more, it will happen!

They need to keep re-evaluating, recreating, re-imagining, re-energizing and continuing to build the capacity of people.

That is the thing I think the evaluation needs to address. I think that movements grow and initiatives change, and there needs to be a looking at what form should this be taking?

I would like to see them coming together and celebrating their success and acknowledging the progress they have made and acknowledging where they have not been as successful…saying, "Now where? What? How do we shift and change to meet what is happening in our community?" I don't know what that is going to be but what I see us coming together to make some decisions about that because things will have changed, hopefully in some major ways and in some positive ways. It's the recalibration, saying, "This is where we started and this the way the world was when we started. Here is where we are today and what has changed. What does that mean for our effort?" To me that is more important than having a clear vision. It's a reassessment of where we are, how we celebrate. What have we missed and what does that mean going forward and how has the world changed to shape what we do? It's the recalibration that would be important for me in five years rather than a picture that I have in my mind right now.

It is my hope…they will go out beyond our immediate objectives and address what the economists for the region think is possible and design Wisconsin Rapids as an ideal and then work backwards from that to the CPI' current and future objectives.

I would want you to help them evaluate the strategies that have been employed, looking at hard data as to whether it is something that should be continued or changed or improved in some say. You can fall in love with your ideas and you know what happens when people fall in love. You have trouble seeing clearly and accurately the flaws. They do come into clear focus later on. I think it really helps people to take a hard look at what worked well, what didn't work well. In other words, what do you need to let go of? What do you need to embrace and take on? They both are equally important. Sometimes things have to die in order for new things to be born, and that is always the hardest thing for anyone who has started an initiative because they have fallen in love with it. You have

birthed it, tended it, nurtured it and you've seen it work. It takes a lot of strength and courage to say, "Maybe we do need to let something go."

The part I struggle with when I think about the possibilities for the future is that I think there are a lot. Right now there are so many programs that fall under the CPI umbrella that it is hard to keep track of all that's going on, which is a good thing but I also think that because there are some programs…and I think the ALI is a good example, where it is such a strong program that it almost stands on its own. The hard part for me is that sometimes I think those programs get lost under the big umbrella. People don't know about them because they fall under that umbrella where a lot of the programs are strong enough, I think, that people recognize them but they don't know if they fall or don't fall under CPI. Sometimes it can be kind of confusing. So, as far as possibilities for the future, I think maybe differentiating the programs might be helpful for the public.

The CPI is and was a movement and it has reached a different stage and phase now. The leaders need to relook at what their particular roles will be going forward because if they have given over more and more of the authority and decision making for what the community should be looking like and what it should be doing, their role absolutely has to change. So, it has moved from movement to maybe a different stage. Then they need to look at how to allocate the responsibilities for what goes on in the community. That is what it has been all about. It's really been a redistribution of responsibilities and power and authority for what happens in that community, always keeping in mind the greater good of the community rather than ego or individual economic benefit.

I think it has run its course; they are getting tired and need new blood.

A related comment from the Community Conversations concluded,

"There are those who question the success of job growth, and have interest in putting the brakes on."

When asked to think about what directions CPI should take in the future, many spoke about the need to reach out to the wider community.

So there has to be kind of a missionary work done in terms of making it known that this is something that is good for the community, something that is absolutely necessary for the community. And we need to express that in a way that kind of allays people's fears, actually puts it in a very positive manner, which is what it is actually… something that creates a venue for young people to have a reason to stay here instead of leaving to go someplace else, providing job opportunities for people who might have been squeezed out of the more traditional industries here. So, I think that is the big area where CPI has been good in terms of simply continuing to mine every avenue they can to better educate us about the importance of what is going on and to educate us as to how we can be better ambassadors for the project and for the efforts they are making.

A number of respondents focused on specific aspects of CPI, including recruiting volunteers, leadership succession, the need for a regional focus, and the need to rethink/reinvigorate the Community Progress Teams.

I guess you need to constantly have a succession plan for the cluster leadership, so your cluster groups don't burn out and fizzle.

Some of our initial objectives have been achieved and it is time to identify some new ones…therefore the benefit of another rally and revisiting the community visions. (Community Conversation participant)

…a number of us have been about it for awhile, and we need to talk about how we can get some new involvement because we really didn't have any term limits. It's like, once you are on there, you are on there for eternity. I think that is a challenge. It

seems to me that we need to rethink and work with the clusters and say, "OK, where are you with your teams? Where are you with the number of people that you have? How is the attendance? How are you doing? How is everybody's spirit?" and all of that stuff. We need something like that to have us continue with the commitment, enthusiasm and the depth that we want to move on with.

It just seems to me that they are going to have to reconnect with these communities because our … progress team only has two to three people on it. They are the people from the original group, and I think that is good but there are a lot of goals that have started in the interim that…communication between the original people of the community progress initiative and the town …is disconnected. So the CPI can't be supportive of some of the goals that are now on our plate because they don't know what they are. …we need a process to identify people again and to see what our goals are again and how we are struggling or how we are making those goals, so [CPI] can be supportive of them. Today there are two people of 25 left on that organization… they needed some guidance too. …it seems like they are good at starting something. They plant the seed but they never stick around long enough to water and nurture that so that eventually someone in the community becomes developed or strong enough to pick up where they left off.

In contrast to the above statement, one person commented, "A lot of groups in the smaller communities, they seem to sustain it a little better," indicating the diverse experiences among the groups. A common refrain among comments about the future was:

I think they will run into problems with volunteers.

A number of comments from the interviews and the focus groups mentioned the need to have some celebration event. In the Community Conversations the comment was made that:

Most important, celebrate successes with a list that you can communicate.

Specific Program-related Recommendations

Communication: Respondents indicated that the initiative has improved communication among and within communities, yet they also feel that the message has not reached deeply into the community, particularly to the blue collar, union and minority sectors. Several people thought there should be an initiative-specific marketing and communications committee to coordinate marketing across programs, sectors and organizations.

Broadening the Reach: A very few respondents felt that CPI was already too stretched—that staff time and resources are spread too thinly over too many projects. Others encouraged the development of a broader engagement effort. Among the suggestions offered were:

1. Create a committee on social services that will bring in the faith community and the social services agency.

2. Expand outreach and marketing deeper into the community, particularly into the blue-collar communities and poorer sections of the community. One person thought that short, well-designed newsletters should be stuffed in grocery bags.

3. Expand outreach to small businesses.

Leadership: Specific recommendations include:

1. Find ways to offer more scholarships and make the classes more diverse, including people from unions and the blue-collar community.

2. Address the need for leadership succession planning in developing and implementing leadership programs.

3. Connect leadership opportunities and jointly market them.

Clusters: Strengthen the goals and objectives of the clusters to help them make better progress.

Launch and Rallies: People felt these were highly successful in bringing people together and focusing on key goals. Given that many goals have been attained and the change in the volunteer pool, many felt there was a need for another round or launch-like effort to reinvigorate programs and participants and to encourage more people to participate.

New Ideas! Speaker Series: Four respondents expressed concern about the cost of the series and poor attendance. Some people recommended using more local and regional speakers; others suggested that a speaker's bureau would help participants give talks about CPI successes and experiences in local clubs, agencies, and businesses.

Experiential Learning Study Tours: Several respondents suggested that there be more tours organized around regional and state attractions, so it is easier for people to attend.

Youth Programs: Nearly all respondents supported engagement of young people and felt that CPI should:

1. Increase opportunities for youth to participate in the community and in CPI.

2. Find ways for youth participants to continue meeting together and working on projects.

3. Increase recognition of the role youth can play in the communities' future.

Community Progress Teams/Progress Fund Committees: The primary recommendations related to these programs included the need for more support, another launch-like activity, and help with recruiting volunteers. One group also mentioned that they did not get many requests for grants from the community.

Economic Development: Respondents suggested that economic development-related training be better marketed and that CPI find a way to show documentation on job and business creation. Several wanted CPI to attract a large employer to address the recent big layoffs.

Evaluator Recommendations

Where Do We Go from Here?

In sifting through the many comments and suggestions and discussing them with the CPI Evaluation Advisory Committee, the evaluator found key differences in how people use language, as well as differences in perceptions. These differences, coupled with the CFGSWC April Statement of Position, influence discussion around the future. From one perspective, people associated with CFGSWC have spoken in terms of the initiative becoming a movement.

Millesen et al. ask, "Is this a movement as defined by Carson? Carson explains that …a movement focuses 'on the necessity for the work, what can be achieved and how' (2004: 4-5)" (2007: 7).

From this perspective it is important to see CPI, not as an entity or a thing, but as just a beginning. Respondents speaking from this perspective often emphasized that initiatives are only meant to last three or four years, and indeed, CPI was designed as a three-year effort. As the key elements of CPI become accepted, they should be institutionalized in existing community agencies. To that end, the April 2008 CFGSWC Statement of Position suggested that each partner take on the CPI programs most related to their mission and determine the "appropriate language by which to give attribution to 'CPI inspired programming' in 2009 and creation of a new visual and key messages which identify how progress has become part of our community culture" (CFGSWC, 2008: 3).

I think it could be time to kind of re-evaluate what CPI is doing and to ask us some new questions… see as we look to the future if we had to create something brand new right now, what would it be? It seems to me that we need to be confident enough about where we are going. We can't be afraid to make a change. So we need to ask, "Does the current structure work today?" It has worked over the last five to six years; now let's move on to the next phase. It may mean shaping things differently. I don't know what that means. I don't know what that might be, but we shouldn't be afraid to ask the question. How do we change it to make it work best for us?

They are hanging onto a name that needs to transition into something else. It's been four years; I just feel that it is worn out. It needs to reinvent with less scattering and more focused leadership or business development, and focus resources in two areas instead of 15…[it] can't be everything to everybody. If you could redirect and focus more narrowly...

In contrast most respondents, particularly those who have participated in CPI activities, see CPI as an entity with leaders, programs and opportunities to grow. From this perspective, it makes sense to recreate a launch-like activity to celebrate successes, bring more people into the work of CPI, and re-commit to a change agenda.

In response to the idea that CPI should go away, several respondents offered thoughtful comments about the value of the brand and the opportunity to build on past marketing to increase involvement and presence within the community. "Throwing that away doesn't make any sense," sums up this perspective.

Several people also mentioned how important it has been for the two partners to model collaborative work and lamented the potential loss of the model. A Community Conversation participant commented that if CPI goes away, many people will think it failed. If one assumes that the CPI efforts will be taken on by various organizations, what happens to expand and maintain the capacity-building efforts that CPI has been so successful with? If many people are actors on the stage rather than stage directors, playwrights, or producers, then the next steps for the Initiative must clearly identify the manager, director, and producer roles and the agencies who support these roles.

Thanks for the three years and keep going! It takes awhile to take root; you need it to produce the fruit change—just starting to build a common language. It takes a while and momentum is just coming. It has been a long haul; [we're] just starting to hit our stride. [The] Rally…that wouldn't have happened. They had the years of experience so people paid attention. The CPI buttons—people are wearing them. Keep it going and anything we could do to help it…keep going.

The majority of people felt that CPI was a very good thing for the community, and while some adjustments are necessary, it is too good of a thing to end. Related comments include:

I think that is what I see in five years, a stronger economic development group that is really focused on the economic growth of the region…And the philanthropy piece growing and getting stronger, and then those two strong partners continuing to work together for the good of the region.

One way to view the question of next steps is: do we re-energize the existing brand or do we create a new message? Does CPI rekindle the enthusiasm of those who have participated or look for a new direction?

The evaluation data indicates that the brand is still very viable, and people often spoke with passion about their commitment to CPI. For some, CPI represents a new direction for the community and the subsequent mobilization to make positive change. For a few, CPI is primarily the organizations that birthed it. Regardless of perspective, maintaining the status quo will likely lead to a loss of momentum, a falling off in participation, and a degradation of the brand. Rekindling the existing brand with a nuanced new message can address the need to renew the enthusiasm of existing participants and at the same time create a message to expand CPI involvement not only in recruiting new sectors of the community but also in presenting a regional focus.

The CPI Evaluation Advisory Committee has asked the evaluator to make specific recommendations. Without the April 2008 CFGSWC Statement of Position, our recommendation, based on the majority of responses, would be that CPI continue to grow and look for ways to support expansion.

Given CFGSWC's position, the evaluator suggests that there is a need to find a way to continue the CPI brand and all that it has come to mean to people. Several options come to mind. One is have HOW continue with CPI and work to expand the base. Several respondents mentioned that HOW staff are already pulled in multiple directions and busy beyond a normal work load. Taking on CPI would add to the burden.

A second alternative, which would also have staffing implications for HOW, would be to create a CPI entity either in the form of a board or advisory committee or as a 501(c)(3). While this strategy would allow CPI to continue as an entity, it would likely also put the new organization in direct competition with the original two partners.

Combining the two ideas so that CPI has an institutional home with HOW, and finding ways to involve participants, other partners, and volunteers in the everyday operation of CPI may also be an alternative.

Another suggestion would be to reformulate CPI as Community Progress, Inc. whose function would be to provide coordination and coaching across the diverse projects underway to be sure that they do add up and develop their own identities and strengths. However, Community Progress, Inc. would also need a home. Additional questions to be considered include:

- Is there a way for other organizations to participate in the brand?
- What would it mean for the community to own the brand?
- What would it mean to have CPI embedded in the culture?
- How can other organizations own CPI or institutionalize CPI into their own structure and process?

Thus, the recommendation is to initiate conversations that can clarify the language being used, perceptions, and options. While the joint boards would be a logical plan to begin this conversation, the evaluator found a lack of transparency in how these discussions and decisions take place, as many participants had very little knowledge and understanding about these matters. This finding indicates the need for engaging others in the discussion.

What Issues Should We Focus on?

The evaluator was asked to find out people's thoughts about what should happen in the next five years, focusing on poverty, broadening the reach, and engaging young people.

In regard to extending the CPI efforts to address poverty, the evaluator received very mixed responses. Although the majority of respondents indicated that they thought addressing poverty was important, a significant minority felt that a focus on poverty would distract from the mission and spread already too thin resources even more. Others said that creating businesses and jobs is the best solution to growing levels of poverty. For those who felt that addressing poverty was important, many spoke about poverty as an issue that could bring in the faith community and the social services sector, perhaps as a committee or cluster. For these folks, the structure and approach of CPI seems ideal for mobilizing people around this issue. Related comments include:

I think we need to stop dividing citizens because every single citizen has a stake in the economic structure of their community. And every single person is entitled to the basic needs—housing, employment, heath care, education.

Wisconsin has an opportunity to reframe the issue and then you can really generate a lot of energy and excitement and commitment when people stop feeling like they are being looked down upon and labeled. They will join in and help make the community what it can be.

I know that the poverty level is increasing in this community and it is something that we have to tackle. I don't believe that has been a primary purpose of CPI at this point but it could be something to give new life to CPI if the organization would like to move into that as a next step, perhaps.

All but two of the interview respondents indicated strong support for the youth element, and these two were concerned about how an emphasis on youth could detract from the main mission. Several people spoke about the desire to build a community that their kids would want to come back to in order to raise their own families. Several other respondents mentioned the importance of the Teen Leadership component and an additional few spoke to the importance of focusing on

entrepreneurship. In both the interviews and the focus groups, people spoke about how exciting it is to see the involvement of youth in the Citizens for a Clean, Green and Welcoming Community. Yet, most people felt there was more that can be done to involve youth. Youth-related focus groups indicated that young people like to be involved in community activities and would like both more opportunities and more involvement in decision making. They also spoke to the need for more kid-friendly places and activities.

Who Else Does CPI Need to Engage?

> *They have to continue to broaden it and include other people. The turnover in the community will continue to happen, and they need to bring on new people, new ideas, new thoughts.*

This question also elicited an array of responses. The majority of interview and focus group respondents felt strongly that CPI needs to expand participation. Among the strategies most often mentioned were bringing in the faith community; reaching out to the blue collar and working class population, including minority groups —particularly Ho Chunk and the Hmong communities; expanding participation of small businesses; and engaging the social sector. Three groups garnered particular attention: blue collar workers and unions, faith-based communities and churches, and the service sector. In regard to the faith-based and the service sector, the suggested strategy is to have CPI convene a committee or cluster around social services. With a neutral convener like CPI, churches and other agencies would feel comfortable in participating.

> *So, the community has real problems with diversity, and it will stunt their growth. I'm hoping in five years we will see more diversity, not [just] tolerating but actually embracing differences and seeing how connected that is to their economic strengths. So, they are gong to be much more competitive in the global market in that way.*

In regard to reaching out to the blue collar and union constituency, several suggestions were made about better marketing, including one to insert quarterly newsletters in grocery bags. Other suggestions included asking them to participate, and attending union and other related organizations' meetings.

Several people felt there was a need to reconnect with those who participated in the initial events and the small town teams; several others felt that broadening the reach could help with succession planning and renewing the volunteer pool. A few people felt that broadening the reach would distract CPI from its mission as resources and people are already spread too thin.

> *I don't think that they have multiplied communication by 10. I don't think they have a strategy for communicating to the community at large and to various sectors of the community the results of their work.*

> *I think that existing businesses sustained, expanded or started because of the efforts of the CPI need to be publicized a little more.*

Perceptions of CPI: Whether you see CPI as an umbrella sheltering a number of distinct projects, a spider plant growing more spiders and seeding new plants, or a lightening bolt that has catalyzed a movement for change, many people lack a clear understanding of what CPI is and how it works. As people work on deciding the next steps, some discussion on how decision making and programming can be more transparent would be useful.

Recommendations Related to Future Directions

1. People are hoping this evaluation will answer questions about what CPI should look like in the future, and the evaluator has provided information on three options. She, however, does not live in the community and will not have to live with any new direction or structure. Currently, there is confusion about what is going on and why, and that needs to be addressed. Whatever CPI does or wherever it goes, that process needs to be as transparent as possible. Perhaps this is an opportunity for the next big event to not only celebrate successes, but to also engage people in dialog about what structure and name or brand they want to see for the future.

2. Find ways to preserve the structure and process people describe as the heart of CPI success, the platform for launching new ideas.

3. Preserve the brand; it has meaning across the community and changing it may invite suggestions of failure.

Our interview and focus group protocols did not specifically ask participants about recommendations for future funding. Most participants are aware that CPI has been successful in garnering outside funding, but other than the staff and board focus groups, most respondents were somewhat removed from the resource development and financial management details. When mentioned, respondents indicated a great respect for, and faith in, the ability of staff and leaders to identify funding sources and successfully access them. Several people mentioned that constantly searching for and seeking outside funding is particularly important for HOW, as many of the programs depend on external funding.

Specific Program-related Recommendations

1. Convene a committee or, as respondents described it, a Social Service Cluster around the social services, and invite the faith community to participate. Recruit members of these groups to personally invite others to the first meeting.

2. Working with the faith community and teen leaders can help CPI reach deeper into the community and expand SYP.

3. Respondents were less sure of what CPI does to support the economy, so helping people understand the entrepreneurship pipeline and the role of CPI in business and job development would be helpful.

4. Look for opportunities to expand cluster-based economic development work.

5. Youth expressed great interest in being more involved. Is there a way they could be more involved in the overall leadership development effort? Can they be represented at the cluster co-chairs

meetings? Are there other ways several youth can participate at this level?

6. Encourage a youth-led task force or cluster; explore creating a youth council to the Initiative.

7. In a similar evaluation of another community capacity-building effort, the evaluator learned that leadership programs that include both youth and adults were highly successful and were able to create a space for the youth voice in important ways. These programs allowed youth to participate in a context that played down the social "hot house" atmosphere that sometimes characterizes all team activities. It was notable in the focus group with teens that, while there were more young women than men, few women spoke up. Perhaps a leadership alumni event across programs could address this opportunity.

8. Offer an Entrepreneurial Boot Camp for additional young people.

9. Revisit the possibility of developing a young professionals' network to attract young adults.

10. Several people mentioned that finding ways to get young people to stay or return is critical to the future of the community. Integrating youth attraction strategies into CPI can expand the conversation and the possibilities for action.

11. While many people were able to explain why they were involved in a particular organization or program, others were taking direction and asking for more guidance from CPI. Working to make the theory of change more apparent in programs, particularly the Community Progress Teams/ Progress Fund Committees could help people understand what their next step might be and increase local capacity.

12. Incorporate opportunities for people to think about regional approaches to economic development and how to integrate this perspective into study tours, speaker series, and other activities. While some communities were very focused on how important

recognition of each community is, a number of respondents also talked about the importance of working together regionally.

13. Some Community Progress Teams/Progress Fund Committees have been very successful; yet in all the focus groups, respondents felt a need for more support or another launch or help with recruiting volunteers. If you provide these teams with a coach, whose charge is to help them build their own capacity, these committees can develop the skills and knowledge to be more effective and learn about tools that can make community work more effective.

14. Continue to expand SYP using young people as ambassadors.

15. The data included a number of comments about the ongoing issue of recruiting volunteers and the need for leadership succession. People spoke about the need to reconnect with people, often asking for another big event, perhaps a celebratory event to highlight both successes and the many "small acts."

16. Work to find ways around barriers to implement the school-based enterprise at Nekoosa Academy, based upon Boot Camp discussion.

Gold Star Recommendations

The six recommendations that the evaluator feels merit close scrutiny are:

1. **Find a way to continue and build on the community engagement work CPI has done so successfully.**

   The vast majority of interviews and most of the focus groups pulsed with energy and enthusiasm in regard to CPI and its ability to mobilize people to take action for the betterment of the community. Several leadership training graduates spoke to the fact that CPI offers a platform for people to bring up new ideas and find ways to initiate change. The existence of this platform, in their minds, is critical for supporting existing efforts and for incubating future efforts. In addition, the overwhelming majority of respondents felt strongly about

the need for another engagement thrust, such as the launch, to deepen CPI's involvement and expand the circle of involvement.

Clearly, CPI has reinforced values related to inclusion. Participants in the staff focus group were more circumspect about such possibilities and more aware of the amount of effort required for such an undertaking. A new round of engagement strategies could also help people see the value of making change with poor people, for example, as opposed to for poor people, as current practice demonstrates the effectiveness of the first approach.

2. **Identify strategies to expand people's awareness of CPI's successes in economic development and their awareness of how economies work.**

   In the interviews and sometimes in the focus groups, respondents would reference the need for a big win—attracting an industry that would bring 500 jobs to the community. The CPI approach to economic development focuses on growing local jobs through fostering entrepreneurship and working with local companies to retain them in the community and to help them expand.

   As indicated in the Millesen reports cited earlier, current scholarship strongly suggests that the strategies undertaken by CPI have a better return on the development dollar for several reasons.

   First, the attraction approach is highly competitive and some practitioners have likened the opportunity for success as equivalent to playing the lottery. Second, branch plants and existing large industries may relocate jobs, but do not, in fact, create many jobs. Third, plants attracted to a particular area are prone to move on in 5-10 years, leaving the community back where it started.

   By probing more deeply into respondents' thoughts on this matter, the evaluator learned that some responses reflected a concern that areas adjacent to the major highways were growing faster and that the Wisconsin Rapids area was not doing enough to attract more of these businesses. In addition,

several key community leaders expressed concerns about causality—they don't trust the data on job and business creation. The recent economic concerns may contribute to an escalating demand for the big win. Addressing these concerns could be key to garnering continued support within the community and expanding support for local and regional business development.

3. **Activate a Social Services Cluster (as respondents referred to it) to engage communities of faith and social service agencies.**

   Given the current downturn in the economy, this recommendation has become perhaps even more important than when we heard the suggestion from several different groups. This effort can harness a great deal of enthusiasm and at the same provide a way for CPI values and opportunities for engagement to reach more people.

4. **Address the need for capacity building support in the Progress Teams.**

   As mentioned earlier, several of the focus groups involved in local Progress Teams indicated that some Teams are struggling. While the Progress Teams bring people together to act on their concern and love for their community, often they lack the capacity for sustainability. In addition, finding volunteers often came up as an ongoing challenge. This work can be resource intensive, so a next steps decision is critical. It might be possible to identify leadership graduates or other volunteers to act as coaches for these teams; perhaps there is an option to assign staff to support them. Or, perhaps the resources don't exist to take on such an effort at this point in time and officially collapsing the Progress Teams and Progress Fund Committees is a good idea.

5. **Work with young people to identify more opportunities for youth involvement and for adult/youth leadership activities.**

   In all of the sessions involving young people, respondents talked about how much they appreciated the opportunity to be involved in community activities. The leadership alumni group, in particular, had lots of ideas for how they could be more involved. In addition a small number of diverse respondents mentioned the need to involve young people more in as many aspects of CPI as possible because, "we want them to come back."

6. **Expand both SYP and youth entrepreneurship activities into the schools.**

   Several respondents spoke specifically about taking SYP into the schools as a way to expand SYP into the larger community. In addition more and more projects are focusing on youth entrepreneurship as a critical element in populating a pipeline for business development. Indeed, many young people are often engaged in entrepreneurial ventures that go unnoticed but could be nurtured to support additional business development capacity.

Conclusions

CPI has accomplished a great deal; it has engaged citizens, created businesses, and increased civility and collaboration across and within communities. CPI intended to change the environment from one of dependency and despair to a business-friendly environment community and an engaged citizenry. The initial activities initiated by CPI brought many people together to create a vision for a positive future and to find ways to act on that vision, resulting in a reframing of opportunities and possibilities. These initial actions created a sense of urgency among community members, enticing them to act on these ideas, and thus creating new opportunities, particularly in relation to the value of collaborative ventures, entrepreneurship and business development as drivers of economic development, and taking leadership roles.

From a systems perspective, our data supports a conclusion that CPI has led to a spiraling up of community assets. CPI has invested local assets or been a catalyst for investing local assets from across the community, resulting in the growth of assets across the communities. Overwhelmingly, when asked about the most significant change as a result of CPI, people described new assets in social and cultural capital by describing new ways of thinking and doing, new ways of working together, and new partners. People felt that these new assets were critical to the work necessary to expand financial and human capital—new jobs and businesses, increased philanthropic activity, and enhanced political capital as indicated in increased participation in the political process and enhanced efficacy of local governments. Figure 1 (p. 33) illustrates both the spiraling down of community assets that led to the need for CPI and the spiraling up of resources that has resulted from the CPI effort. This spiraling up graphic is similar to graphs of other change initiatives and points to the importance of expanding social capital and bringing in new views of what is possible.

The emergence of what people have described as second generation efforts such as SYP, efforts that have spun off from core CPI activity, illustrate the power for ch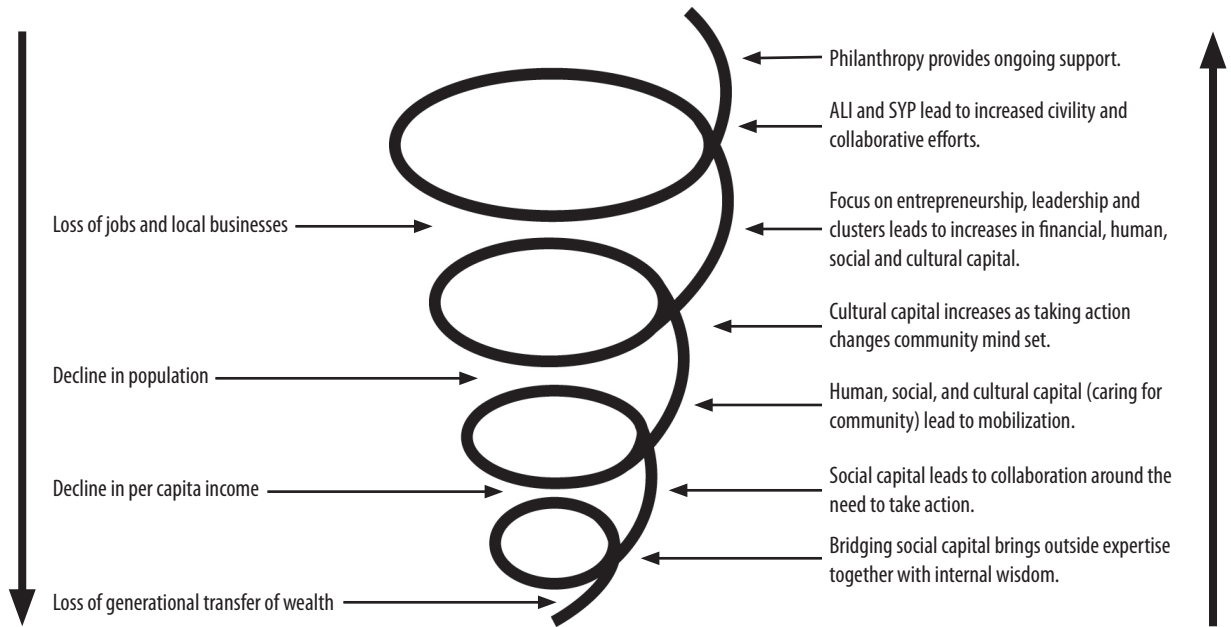ange inherent in the CPI model. As people become involved, they create additional opportunities for involvement within the CPI structure and new programs independent of CPI. The image of a spider plant that produces new spiders dependent on the mother plant, as well as spiders that drop off and become independent, illustrates this process.

The evaluator was asked to compare the CPI effort to other community change initiatives she has reviewed. The rapidly changing times have encouraged a plethora of community change initiatives focused on helping people find for themselves a viable, if not vibrant, future for their community. All are exciting learning laboratories for understanding the possibilities of change. Practitioners and researchers, however, agree that those initiatives that have broad engagement strategies, focus on assets, help people find new ways of thinking about their community and its future, mobilize people around their passion for the community and core values, and create new ways for people to interact together as they work for that future are more sustainable over time.

The evaluator also has found that a broad focus on system change accompanied by a theory of change is important to creating the vibrant communities and regions of the future. The image of the spider plant, which creates new spiders but also nurtures new plants, describes how CPI has created numerous programs that help people participate in the change agenda and at the same has also generated new programs and projects that operate somewhat independently of CPI, and illustrates the strength of the initiative and its power to seed positive and successful change.

CPI has a phenomenal track record. Wisely, CPI leaders have engaged in a process of evaluation and reflection to learn from successes and to plan for the future. This report offers suggestions that can guide them on the next stage of their journey.

Figure 1. Spiraling Up and Down of Community Assets

Philanthropy provides ongoing support.

ALI and SYP lead to increased civility and collaborative efforts.

Loss of jobs and local businesses

Focus on entrepreneurship, leadership and clusters leads to increases in financial, human, social and cultural capital.

Cultural capital increases as taking action changes community mind set.

Decline in population

Human, social, and cultural capital (caring for community) lead to mobilization.

Decline in per capita income

Social capital leads to collaboration around the need to take action.

Bridging social capital brings outside expertise together with internal wisdom.

Loss of generational transfer of wealth

Resources

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Appendix 1

Ideas for the Evaluation Developed From Discussion with CPI Evaluation Advisory Committee

April 23, 2008

What do we want know?

- Clarify where we've been and where we want to go.
- Create the context for discussion about moving forward.
- Did we meet the expectations of people?
- Would things have happened anyway if the CPI was not around?
- What are the core drivers, key pieces, key components?
- What has made the most significant difference?
- What institutional resources, human and financial, were invested? With what results?
- As a result of CPI what are the key differences?
- Are more holistic approaches more effective in changing culture?
- Has the culture changed?
- Why are some people still questioning success?
- How do people perceive the leadership style, top down or broad-based?
- What synergies if any emerge come from an integrated approach? Are standalone programs as successful as those that are integrated into a broader strategy?
- How do we expand the stakeholders and engage new communities and groups (Asian, Latino, Ho-chunk, poor, rich)?
- Can the initiative be everything to everybody?
- How is/can the CPI address poverty?
- How has CPI changed community views and actions in regard to the value of partnerships and collaboration?
- How has the structure of power, access to power, and power holders changed? What role has CPI had in those changes?
- How does/can CPI extend partnerships and collaboration to engage more partners on more issues?

- Should CPI take on new issues?
- How has the work CPI initiated been institutionalized in the community?
- What is the impact of program participation on participants and the community?
- Has the organizational capacity building been aligned with what we seek to do?
- What needs did we address? What needs must we address in going forward?
- How effective has the modeling behavior of the key partners been in encouraging others to partner?
- What are the tangible changes in the community? How do we document them?
- How do we identify the most important pieces and grow them?
- What role has the media played in CPI?
- What role has faith-based groups played? What role might they play in the future?
- Who are the people we missed? How do we reach them?
- What role have elected officials played? What role might they play in the future?
- To what extent do people really believe they must take responsibility for the future?
- To what extent have we created an innovative business friendly culture?
- How does information flow in the community?
- How effective was Speak Your Piece and the 9 Tools of Civility?

Other expectations:

- Boost energy, revitalize.
- Develop an analysis that makes sense to people.
- Learn from our past to be more effective in the future.

- Provide a narrative that interprets the numbers.
- Verify, or not, the data collected.
- Demonstrate we are not afraid to ask tough questions.
- How do we characterize ourselves in the future? Movement, initiative, other?
- Provide opportunity for leaders of clusters to give feedback.

Appendix 2:

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your connection to the Community Progress Initiative. If active, then,
   - What was it about the CPI that made you want to be involved?
   - Please describe an activity or event that you felt made a significant difference?
   - What was it about the activity or event that made it successful?
   - When you think about the possibilities for the future, what possibilities do you see for CPI? What could make the Initiative even more successful? What new partners might become engaged in this work?

2. What expectations did you have for CPI? In what ways were those expectations fulfilled or not fulfilled?

3. What do you see as the most significant changes in the community since 2004? From your perspective, what role did CPI play in addressing those changes or in facilitating those changes?

4. What resources have been important to the work of CPI? In your opinion have they been used wisely?

5. CPI has focused on change from several vectors. How important is the work across the components to the overall impact of CPI?

6. To what extent if any, have you seen changes in community leadership styles and approaches? What changes, if any, do you see in who holds power and who has access to power? What role, if any, did CPI play in these changes?

7. To what extent, if any, have you seen changes in the community culture in regard to how people think about the community and their role in the community? What role, if any, did CPI play in these changes?

8. To what extent, if any, have you seen changes in how organizations, governments, and agencies work together in the community? What role, if any, did CPI play in these changes?

9. What impact, if any, has the "Speak Your Peace" and Nine Tools of civility had on the communities? How might those programs have an even greater impact?

10. To what extent, if any, do you feel that CPI has had a positive impact on business climate, job growth, and entrepreneurship? How might those programs have an even greater impact?

11. To what extent, if any, do you feel CPI have engaged young people in working for their community and in considering entrepreneurship?

12. In your opinion, how important is collaboration to successful community economic development? Has the local practice around collaboration changed? What role, if any, did CPI play in these changes?

13. In your opinion how important is it for CPI to broaden its reach, expand its stakeholders, and engage more community groups? What groups would you like to see more actively involved? How might CPI reach out to those groups?

14. In your opinion how important is it for CPI address poverty? What strategies might CPI utilize to mobilize people around the eradication of poverty?

15. When you think about five years into the future, where do you see the CPI? What issues is it tackling? What partners are engaged?

16. What role has the local media played in supporting CPI? What expectations do you have for media support in the future? What would you like to see?

17. How do people learn about CPI activities and events? What strategies might CPI use to involve more people and to make information even more accessible to people?

Appendix 3

Focus Group Questions
(Customized for each group using the following format)

1. Please introduce yourself and share an example of when you saw the leadership component of CPI result in positive community change. What factors contributed to that success.

2. As you heard the stories people shared about how the leadership component of the initiative has made a difference what insights and/or common themes emerged as factors that have contributed to success?

3. What might it look like if the leadership component was even more successful? What would it take to get us there?

4. What programs/events/activities make up the leadership component?

5. What we want to do now it to look at how the leadership component is making a difference in the communities and region. We will use the Community Capitals Framework to help us in the mapping as it allows us to look at the community from a 30,000 ft. perspective. The Community Capitals include: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built capital.

6. When you think about the programs, events, and activities connected to leadership, what are people doing differently as a result?

7. Who benefits or doesn't benefit as a result of people doing things differently?

8. What kinds of systems changes are you seeing as people and communities as a result of the changes?

9. What do you think is the most significant change resulting from the leadership work?

Appendix 4

Focus Group Themes and Participation

	Number of Attendees	Invited
Wisconsin Rapids Area Progress Team/Progress Fund Committee	8	9
Wednesday Morning Breakfast Club	7	7
Retired Doctor's Group	6	0
Teen Leadership (regularly scheduled meeting)	17	21
Faith-based Representatives	5	7
Pittsville/Rudolph/Vesper Progress Teams/Progress Fund Committees	6	17
Rome Progress Team/Progress Fund Committee	6	14
Joint Boards	10	25
Advanced Leadership Institute	4	19
Joint Staff	15	19
Port Edwards Progress Team/Progress Fund Committee and Nekoosa Progress Fund	8	11
Community Leadership	4	6
Industry Clusters/Entrepreneurial Boot Camp	9	22
Nekoosa Academy	5	5
Experiential Learning Study Tours	2	14
Municipal Officials	0	7
TOTAL	**112**	**203**

Appendix 5

Interview Participation

	Number Participating
AFFILIATION	
Business	6
Education / Workforce Development	3
Municipal / Elected Officials	5
Outside Consultant	5
Funder	1
Citizens (not representing business or municipal)	3
CPI PARTICIPATION	
Leadership Programs	11
Study Tours	9
Clusters	9
Progress Teams and Fund Committees	2
Boot Camps	4