ECONOMIC DEVASTATION, RENEWAL, AND GROWTH: COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS AS CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE

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Abstract:
This research examines how the Community Foundation of South Wood County in partnership with the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance coordinated an effort to transform community culture. The Community Progress Initiative was established to promote responsible, collaborative, and visionary citizenship resulting in increased social capital. The goal was to make South Wood County and The Town of Rome more self-reliant and less dependent amidst tremendous economic turmoil. This unique case study provides a rare opportunity to examine how 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.

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The research presented in this report was funded with a generous grant from the Nonprofit Sector Collaborative Research Mini-Grant Program through the Helen Bader Institute for Nonprofit Management at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Additional funding was provided through the Donor's Forum of Wisconsin, the Community Foundation of South Wood County, and the Ford Foundation. The research team gratefully acknowledges their contributions. We also wish to express our sincere gratitude to Kelly Lucas, the Chief Executive Officer of the Community Foundation of South Wood County, and Connie Loden, the Executive Director of the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Development Alliance, for their support and enthusiasm for this work as well as the many community members who so graciously gave of their time and shared their thoughts and ideas about the Community Progress Initiative. Without their cooperation, encouragement, and interest, this final report could not have been written.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has been argued that community foundations play an important leadership role in improving the quality of life of their communities by stimulating and coordinating philanthropic giving while also being responsive to the changing needs of local constituents--not only donors and grantees, but also volunteers, board members, nonprofit organizations, the media, collaborative partners in the public, private, and not-for-profit communities, and the disadvantaged and previously disengaged (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 1994). Thus, in times of economic uncertainty, rapid technological change, dwindling resources, and complex societal needs, community foundations play a key role in building community stability and empowerment. There is however, little documentation about how community foundations actually function as change agents helping citizens to create and advance new visions for their communities.

With funding from the Nonprofit Sector Collaborative Research Mini-Grant Program through the Helen Bader Institute for Nonprofit Management at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the Donor's Forum of Wisconsin, the Community Foundation of South Wood County, and the Ford Foundation, a team of researchers from Ohio University and the Greater Green Bay Community Foundation embarked upon a comprehensive research project to examine work being done through the Community Progress Initiative, a collaborative effort between the Community Foundation of South Wood County and the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Development Alliance. In response to economic and cultural decline, the Community Progress Initiative was launched to promote responsible, collaborative, and visionary citizenship with the ultimate goal of transforming community culture and invigorating economic development. The research team employed a multi-method data collection strategy to address four key questions:

- What role did the community foundation play in coordinating the change process?
- How is the community foundation working with community leadership and local citizens to define and build economic stability and sustainability through the Community Progress Initiative?
- What were the barriers to implementing broad-based community change and what role did the community foundation play in overcoming these obstacles?
- How is this initiative changing the way local citizens are involved in defining and evaluating economic stability and community viability?

This report provides a summary of the archival and interview data collected and includes: a detailed description of the research methodology, information about the Community Progress Initiative, the major findings, a discussion of implications for practice, and directions for future research. The study produced a number of interesting findings; most notable were:

- Effective leadership is inclusive leadership. Replacing one type of dependency with another is never a viable solution. Engaging and empowering the citizens is an instrumental part of shifting attitudes and creating sustainable community change.
- Model the behavior expected from others. The Community Foundation of South Wood County and The Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Development Alliance engaged in an unprecedented collaborative partnership, crossing boundaries and working together to realize a common vision for the community. Their strategic organizational alliance serves as an inspiration to both the community foundation and economic development fields.
- Communication is more than the one-sided promotion of specific interests. 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. Engage the responsible critics by "meeting people where they are" and by focusing on common interests. Above all else, be patient, sometimes making a commitment just takes time.
- Most meaningful change is incremental; be patient and stay the course. Maintain momentum by celebrating success – even the small successes, investing in developing future leaders, and by asking for help.

These findings fill a significant gap in the academic literature by contributing a comprehensive, empirical understanding of how one rural community foundation facilitated a coordinated effort to transform community culture. Moreover, the findings also yield practical knowledge and advice for community foundations interested in taking on a community-leadership role.

INTRODUCTION

Community foundations are a rapidly growing and influential part of today's nonprofit sector. As public institutions with a long-term commitment to specific geographic areas, community foundations are uniquely positioned to engage members of the community through philanthropy in the development of a thorough understanding of community needs and nonprofit capacity, and to lead strategic community-based efforts. Even though community foundations collectively control over $30 billion in assets (Hamilton, Parzen, and Brown, 2004) very little is known about how these important groups discharge their responsibilities. As Carman (2001) notes, most literature does not emphasize process but rather describes history and growth, structural capacity (legal, grantmaking, and financial), leadership and community responsiveness, financial investment patterns, and aggregate statistical data.

Community foundations can play an important leadership role in improving the quality of life of their communities by stimulating and coordinating philanthropic giving while also being responsive to the changing needs of local constituents--not only donors and grantees, but also volunteers, board members, nonprofit organizations, the media, collaborative partners in the public, private, and not-for-profit communities, and the disadvantaged and previously disengaged (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 1994). Thus, in times of economic uncertainty, rapid technological change, dwindling resources, and complex societal needs, it seems reasonable to expect community foundations to play a key role in building community stability and empowerment.

In spite of their unique ability to improve communities, the study of how these important groups convene resources, facilitate dialogue, solve problems, and advocate change is still relatively young. Only recently have there been published reports documenting the ways in

which community foundations are leading community change (see for example, Bernholz, Fulton, and Kasper, 2005; Hamilton, Parzen, and Brown, 2004; Millesen, 2005; Ragey, Masaoka, & Peters, 2005). One limit to these existing studies is that many of the examples provided are taken from larger, more established community foundations in urban areas, which is troublesome particularly given that just under 20% (121 out of 636) of all community foundations in the United States have a market value of more than $50 million and just over 50% (319 out of 636) have assets totaling less than $10 million (The Columbus Foundation, 2004).

The research detailed in this report addresses a gap in the literature by explaining how one rural community foundation (assets of $18 million in 2004) facilitated a coordinated effort to transform community culture by promoting civic engagement and building social capital in ways that were intended to make the community more self-reliant and less dependent amidst an entrenched civic and economic structure. This coordinated effort took shape in the form of The Community Progress Initiative[1], a joint partnership between the Community Foundation of South Wood County and the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance. The Community Progress Initiative provided a structure that would support broad-based inclusive community involvement, responsible citizenship, entrepreneurial opportunities, and vigorous business growth, while continuing to nurture a spirit of individual philanthropic giving in support of the common good.

Three years into the project, south Wood County and the Town of Rome are experiencing the first stages of the community change initiated through the Community Progress Initiative. In this paper we elaborate on many of the successes by describing the creation of seven "industry clusters" that helped businesses find ways to collaborate, identify new markets, and satisfy

[1] The terms Community Progress Initiative, Progress Initiative, and Initiative are used interchangeably throughout this document.

customers; the development of entrepreneur assistance programs that were designed to encourage the expansion of existing businesses, provide technical assistance to start-up business, and link owners to investment capital; and the establishment of seven community visioning and progress teams with corresponding endowed Progress Funds held by the Community Foundation. The story of how this transformation began and continues to develop has important implications for community foundations throughout the United States committed to strengthening, stabilizing, and empowering communities.

To provide a much needed understanding of rural community leadership and community change, we embarked upon a seven-month research project that included archival data acquisition and analysis as well as intensive interviews with those knowledgeable about, connected to, or skeptical of the Community Progress Initiative. The study was designed to accomplish four key purposes. First, we were particularly interested in developing a better understanding of the role the community foundation played in coordinating the change process. Specifically we wanted to know what motivated the community foundation's involvement; who from the community foundation was involved (board, staff, some combination), and if the community foundation understood its role to be that of a "change agent." We were also curious about whether community leadership evolved – was it re-defined, re-negotiated, or understood differently over time?

Second, we wanted to gather data detailing the ways in which the community foundation was working with community leadership and local citizens to define and build economic stability and sustainability through the Community Progress Initiative. We were interested to learn more about the historical role of the community foundation and how it evolved into an innovator and leader of community change. Third, we wanted to learn more about the barriers to implementing

broad-based community change and the role the community foundation played in overcoming these obstacles. And finally we wanted to document how this initiative changed the way local citizens defined and evaluated economic stability and community viability.

In order to present a comprehensive understanding of the community change processes taking place in south Wood County, this research report is organized in the following manner. First, background information about the economic situation in south Wood County as well as an overview of the Community Progress Initiative is presented. Next, a brief review of the literature is discussed to provide the context and rationale for this type of inquiry. Then the research methodology and data collection strategy are presented. Findings related to the four key purposes of the research are then offered. The paper concludes with implications for practice and directions for future research.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Wisconsin Rapids, the county seat of Wood County, is a rural city of 18,000 people located in central Wisconsin. The city has long been known for its major industry, paper making. For over 100 years Consolidated Papers, Inc., a Fortune 500 company with significant influence from the founding family, was the major employer, economic force, and provider of civic leadership and philanthropic support in the community. The situation changed dramatically in 2000 when Consolidated Papers was purchased by the Swedish-Finnish company Stora Enso Oyj. Executive structure was completely revamped – top management no longer lived in the local area and much of the middle management was eliminated.

Also in 2000, the second major industry in the county, cranberry farming, was devastated by a depressed market. As the largest producer of cranberries in the world, growers from this area watched as cranberry prices sank from $88 per barrel to $8 per barrel. The sale of

Consolidated Papers coupled with the economic impact of a depressed cranberry market resulted in a loss of over 4,500 jobs in a community with total employment of approximately 12,000 people (a 39% reduction in employment)[2]. Not only had the economy in this community been devastated, personal attitudes and beliefs about the future had also suffered. As one young person told us, only three out of fifty-six high school students surveyed indicated they were planning to stay in the community; and these were the farmers, "tied to their land." Many of the people we interviewed postulated that young people had plans to leave because they "don't think anything is going to come of their town…all they see is people losing their jobs."

Unless economic and industry trends reversed (not a likely scenario), south Wood County was a "dying community." What was needed was a way to put the area's economic future into the hands of the people living and working in the area. The Community Progress Initiative, a joint partnership between the Community Foundation of South Wood County and the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance, was established to promote responsible, collaborative, and visionary citizenship to transform community culture and invigorate economic development. The Community Progress Initiative is "a bold three-year program in south Wood County and the Town of Rome to create vibrant communities with prosperous local enconomies."

In short, the challenges facing south Wood County are issues of globalization and no American community is immune from the repercussions of this type of economic upheaval. Understanding the key elements of community culture, leadership, stability, empowerment, charitable giving, as well as defining key roles for major players such as community foundations, government, and local citizens will determine how communities thrive or fail in our global economy. South Wood County proved to be an ideal setting for this case study for two key

[2] As of July 2005

reasons. First, it is a small rural community isolated from other influences. For example, south Wood County has a lack of major employers, relatively little political power, and is not located within a larger metropolitan area. Second, the Community Foundation of South Wood County made a commitment to creating an environment where local citizens had meaningful involvement in shaping and developing the policies and structures that ultimately influence their lives. This community presented a rare opportunity to understand community foundation leadership and identify key elements of community change.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Community foundations operate in a complex and paradoxical environment where multiple constituencies hold competing expectations for performance. For example Philipp (1999) argues that although community foundations exist to serve a broadly defined public including the community at large and nonprofit service providers, increased competition from financial service providers (i.e., banks, investment companies, universities, and federated funders such as the United Way) has created the need for community foundations to specify how their services add value for donors. This suggests that organizational processes are likely to focus on developing investment strategies that will maximize payout rates and provide flexible benefits to a financially savvy donor base, thereby shifting attention away from community responsiveness. Yet, as Joseph (1989) notes, many deplore the idea that decision-making is accountable to community expectations only after donor interests have been satisfied. He suggests that the personal interests of both donors and community members should result in decision-making structures and processes that are responsive to a broad range of needs and priorities.

Leonard (1989) argues that community foundation growth and flexibility are related to the ability to balance needs among donors, recipients, and the community. She further asserts

that most community foundation decision-making processes implicitly favor one or two of these basic elements of mission, such as donor services, grantmaking, or community leadership resulting in "disparate fundraising strategies and rates of growth," particularly when investment strategies conflict with donor service strategies or grantmaking strategies. More recent work (Graddy & Morgan, 2006) suggests that these decision-making choices are affected by organizational characteristics (age), community stability, and external forces (professionalization and competition). Because community foundations enjoy what Noland refers to as a "special double trust: a promise to respect and honor thousands of generous benefactors while advancing new visions for communities" (1989: 121), it is essential that we understand how community foundations are mobilizing the resources to advance a shared vision in ways that are both accountable and responsive.

In a speech delivered at the Community Foundation Symposium in Berlin, Germany, Emmett Carson (2004) speaks passionately about the promise of community foundations as change agents. He asserts that that community foundations are at a crossroads and that the path chosen will arguably shape their future. He describes two very different scenarios, community foundations as a *field* and community foundations as a *movement*. Carson explains that a *field* focuses "the mechanics of how we run our institutions," while a *movement* focuses "on the necessity for the work, what can be achieved and how" (2004: 4-5). He envisions a future where community foundations abandon the customary practices of building assets for the sake of growth or to protect market share (donor-focused approach) in favor of advancing a tradition of philanthropic fundraising focused on social justice (community-focused approach). For Carson, community foundations are in a unique position to function as "social change agents focused on improving communities, especially for those who are poor."

As Millesen (2005) notes a shift in focus requires a clear vision of the community foundation's role and a strong commitment to proactively addressing any resistance that may arise. For example, she argues that a number of the board members she interviewed expressed concern that donors might respond negatively if the community foundation took on an issue that was "too controversial." However, she also notes that those who were embarking on community change initiatives were quick to point out that fears related to alienating donors never actually materialized since, as her informants pointed out, taking a leadership role is not synonymous with taking sides or advocating one position over another. Rather, her data suggest that leading community change means bringing "hot topics" into the open and convening those with the requisite information, resources, and skills to address the issues in a cooperative and collaborative way. This type of leadership can act as a catalyst to unleash grassroots efforts that bring about meaningful change. A report published by the James Irvine Foundation also suggests that "catalyst work can actually help, rather than hinder, a community foundation's growth and relationship with donors" (2003, 8).

Emerging research in the field (Hamilton, Parzen, and Brown, 2004; Lowe, 2004; Ragey, Masaoka, & Peters, 2005; Wolfe, 2006) provides additional support for the idea that community foundations are mobilizing available resources to make appreciable differences in communities across the United States. For example, Ragey, et. al. (2005) examined the relationship between 182 United Ways and 137 community foundations across the country. Their findings suggest that although there are times when interactions between the two organizations can be adversarial, there was evidence to suggest that "cooperation around key community issues is occurring" (2005, 8). Similarly Lowe (2004) documents how three community foundations are working to build support and leverage resources from government, corporations, and foundations to assist

local community development corporations in ways that promote neighborhood-based development initiatives.

Hamilton and colleagues (2004) provide wonderful examples of how community foundations have historically and are currently leading community change amidst a sea of competitive forces[3] that are posing significant asset development challenges. Not only are community foundations "building on their distinctive position and history of community leadership;" they are leveraging that distinctive position to differentiate themselves from the competition by becoming "community change makers" (Hamilton, et. al., 2004, 2).

In sum, as Wolfe (2006) notes, there is tremendous pressure from the field urging community foundations to assume a community-focused leadership role and promote social justice. Recent research supports the notion that community foundations are taking on these leadership roles by serving as knowledge brokers, facilitating the exchange of information across sectoral and organizational boundaries; coordinating collaboration among multiple stakeholders to formulate grass-roots solutions to community problems; accessing necessary resources by connecting government and funding to community needs; and proactively involving private philanthropists both by soliciting new money and by asking donor-advisors to direct their gifts to existing community needs. This study contributes to a growing body of research by describing one rural community foundation's role in facilitating community change and promoting social justice.

[3] Among these challenges are increased competition among other donor service organizations such as banks, investment companies, and universities; the creation of endowment funds at federated funding organizations such as the United Way; donors who demand unprecedented involvement with their giving; an unstable economic environment; and dwindling government support for social services.

METHODOLOGY

A three-person research team comprised of people from Ohio University and the Greater Grey Bay Community Foundation conducted an in-depth case study of the Community Foundation of South Wood County and its role in advancing a new vision for the Heart of Wisconsin area through the Community Progress Initiative. Specifically we employed a multi-method data collection strategy that spanned a period of seven months to explore, describe, and explain the micro-level processes that lead to macro-level community change.

We gathered archival data from local newspapers, websites, and published reports. We also conducted in-depth interviews with individuals from each group participating in the Community Progress Initiative as well as with a few select individuals from outside the community (such as executives from neighboring United Ways, colleges and universities, governments, the Donor's Forum of Wisconsin, and the Ford Foundation) to garner additional perspective on the actual implementation process.

Archival Data

Document review was an important aspect of this research. Archives are rich with descriptive information portraying the values and beliefs of participants in a specific setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Archival data included historical documents such as news articles, editorials, and press releases documenting the work of the Community Progress Initiative. Additionally, we accessed all minutes or summary reports from meetings held with community leaders (i.e., industry cluster meetings) committed to strengthening south Wood County and the Town of Rome in response to the economic decline experienced in 2000. And finally, we reviewed reports, newsletters, and promotional materials detailing the work of the Initiative.

Organizational documents provided insight about the kinds of things that were important to the various stakeholders. For example, cluster group minutes provided details about community issues under consideration and the work that needed to be done. Through articles and editorials, the local newspaper also provided a valuable perspective. While newspaper articles tended to promote, celebrate, and summarize the work of the Community Progress Initiative, we discovered some dissatisfaction with the Initiative through newspaper editorials. These data helped us to not only better understand the work being done through the Community Progress Initiative, but it also provided important insights regarding the Initiative's structure and established the context for analyzing the interview data.

Interview Data

We conducted interviews with 29 community members including the CEOs and board members of Community Foundation and the Heart of Wisconsin, government officials, cluster leaders, business owners, and young people involved in the Community Progress Initiative. Interviewees were identified in two ways. First, the community foundation CEO and her staff provided an initial list of 20 potential informants from which we were able to interview 17 people. We quickly recognized that the list was primarily populated with people who were involved with the work being done through the Initiative. Collectively (and this included the Community Foundation CEO) we determined that in order to better understand the barriers and challenges associated with these types of community change processes, the list needed to include those who may not be enthusiastic about or supportive of these community efforts. To that end, at the initial interviews, we employed a snowball technique whereby we asked those being interviewed if they thought we should speak to others. We explained that we were not only interested in talking with those supportive of and involved with the Initiative, but also those who

had concerns about what was being done. The Community Foundation CEO also provided additional names. This process yielded an additional 20 names, 12 of whom agreed to be interviewed.

FINDINGS

Learning more about and documenting the community empowerment process in south Wood County and the Town of Rome has generated important insights about how other community foundations might take the lead in stimulating economic growth and development across rural America. In this section, we present an overview of the various programs and projects being implemented through the Community Progress Initiative. We also provide specific information about the community foundation's role in coordinating the change process through the Initiative; the barriers to implementing broad-based community change and how these obstacles are being addressed; and how the Initiative is making a difference in the way local citizens define and evaluate economic stability and community viability.

The Community Progress Initiative

> There's been leadership classes. There's been advanced leadership classes…There's been entrepreneurial boot camps. There's been a variety of cluster groups...There's been public listening sessions. There's been town hall meetings…All of these things have been done to help raise awareness; to facilitate the transition from being a dependent culture to becoming a culture that is proactively creating its own future and creating the kind of place where people are proud to live and work. So that is thrust of the Progress Initiative.

As illustrated by the quote above, the Community Progress Initiative is an innovative, inclusive, collaborative effort to involve citizens in building on existing resources to strengthen the local economy, create an entrepreneurial self-reliant culture, and plan for the future. The Community Progress Initiative is working to achieve three broad outcomes through a number of

specific programs and projects.[4] First, the Initiative is creating a business-friendly culture that encourages the expansion of existing businesses, provides technical support to new start-up businesses, and links owners to investment capital. Seven industry cluster networks coordinated by the Heart of Wisconsin (Cranberry/Agriculture, Downtown Revitalization, New *e*-conomies, Paper and Forestry Products, Small Business Development, Tourism, and Workforce Training and Education) have emerged to identify opportunities for growth as well as collectively address, and remove obstacles to future development.[5]

In spite of the tremendous economic upheaval that occurred when the paper mill sold, a vigilant group of community members, including employees from the paper mill, came together to form the Paper and Forestry Product Cluster because they recognized that they had the "capability to create new opportunities that will take advantage of our strengths in the paper and forest products arena." Cluster members organized a Study tour to Appleton, Wisconsin to learn more about how business leaders in the Fox Valley area were operating or creating businesses related to the paper and forestry industry. As a result, the group made a commitment to aid in the creation of new business opportunities for products or services connected to paper that either do not currently exist or are being outsourced to other communities.

One particularly notable achievement directly related to the study tour was the installation of the area's first flexographic printing press used to print labels. Local resident Dave Pryor, owner of Quality Plus Printing, realized that local producers were contracting with printers outside the area for labeling needs. Mr. Pryor expanded his business to include flexographic printing and today those same labels that were produced elsewhere are now done

[4] Specific information about the Community Progress Initiative can be found at www.progressinitiative.com
[5] An eighth cluster focused on Arts & Heritage was formed in October 2006 after a group of residents participated in a study tour to North Carolina. The group toured small communities that use art, heritage, and innovative technologies to revitalize communities that have suffered loss or reductions in textile manufacturing, furniture manufacturing, and tobacco farming.

locally. Mr. Pryor was recognized as "Entrepreneur of the Year" at the Heart of Wisconsin Business & Economic Alliance's Annual Dinner in early 2007.

Several entrepreneur assistance programs have also been established including an *Entrepreneurial Boot Camp* where those with great ideas can come to receive practical guidance and assistance from local experts in the field; a *Business-to-Business Club* (initiated by the Small Business Cluster) that brings together both current and hopeful business owners interested in sharing ideas, learning from peers, and stimulating entrepreneurial initiatives; an *Ideas Incubator* which is a web-based database used to link investors, entrepreneurs, and interested citizens; and a series of technical support activities including one-on-one advice and mentoring, workshops and seminars, and a television series called *Small Business School* produced and narrated by Hattie Bryant of PBS. These entrepreneurial programs have attracted the attention of the state and federal officials as well as those who have committed grants from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce and the US Department of Agriculture. In addition, a $248,000 federal appropriation through Representative Dave Obey's office to establish an *Entrepreneurial Loan Fund* – administered by the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance – provides start-up funds to entrepreneurs with solid business plans.

A second intended outcome of the Community Progress Initiative is to nurture community leadership, relationships, networks, and knowledge in ways that build a strong and positive local community. A number of innovative programs are providing community members with the practical skills training needed to achieve success and to "drive positive change." With keen awareness that other communities both nationally and internationally have overcome similar challenges, a number of community members took part in one or more study tours to examine and learn more about how to implement existing best practices in the areas of tourism,

city planning, community organizing, economic development, education and philanthropy. A recent study tour to Ireland included time spent with Avila Kilmurray and the Community Foundation of Northern Ireland; their focus on building peace, nurturing relationships, and advancing positive social change was a powerful learning experience for tour participants.

The *New Ideas! Speaker Series*, is a program that motivates new thinking by bringing in "nationally known speakers to share research, stories, and innovative plans that can be adapted for the area." The *Advanced Leadership Institute* is a seven-month adaptive skills training program provided by Ki Thoughtbridge to address the critical skills needed to support a cultural shift by identifying common interests. With a specific focus on communication, conflict resolution, change management, and trust building this program fosters respect, civility, equity, and inclusion while teaching people to relate to each other in new and different ways. The ultimate goal of the *Advanced Leadership Institute* is to create and maintain a strategic leadership group that will support regional planning collaboration, advocacy, and increase the momentum of social and economic change in the Heart of Wisconsin area. A *Teen Leadership Program* comprised of sophomores from area high schools is in its first year and engaging young people in meaningful ways throughout the community. And finally, the *Heart of Wisconsin Community Leadership Program*, is an eight-month program in which participants learn more about a variety of topics including local and regional community and economic development; issues related to education, health and human services; networking and group processes; and conflict resolution. Program participants apply their new skills by designing and implementing a community improvement project.

Though not included as part of Community Progress Initiative programming, the Community Foundation is sponsoring a multi-year initiative focused on 'Building Better

Boards'. Based on a successful program at the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice (Florida), early results from the program in south Wood County are very encouraging. The training opportunities are designed to build the skill and leadership capacity of local nonprofit as well as publicly elected and appointed board members.

The Community Progress Initiative is a regional collaborative whereby seven "local" communities working both at home and with their neighbors create a region where "fresh ideas are appreciated, diversity is celebrated, and unique activities are abundant." Organized into seven *Progress Teams* (one representing each local community), hundreds of community members have participated in "Make it Happen Visioning Sessions" and "Progress Rallies" to identify, celebrate, and promote what makes each of the individual communities unique. Moreover, youth groups have been forming to give young people (grades 5 through 12) a voice in developing and implementing projects that speak to their needs. For example, when the largest municipality announced it would no longer solely provide funding for the region's July 4th fireworks display, a group of students from the local high schools was instrumental in raising money from all area municipalities and the local community so that the "show would go on." What makes this fundraising effort particularly significant that it represented unprecedented partnership and cooperation among different municipalities working toward a common goal.

The third broad outcome to be achieved through the Community Progress Initiative is to create an innovative, entrepreneurial, self-reliant culture by increasing capital and attracting funding. With generous funding from Ruth & Hartley Barker and Gilbert & Jaylee Mead, two philanthropic families who are descendents of George Mead I, founder of the former Consolidated Papers, Inc. The Barkers and Meads refer to south Wood County as their "Heart Home," and to date, have committed $3.1 million in contributions in support of the Barker Mead

Fund at the Community Foundation. In addition to capacity-building support for the community foundation, a portion of this fund has been used to create seven community endowment funds that will assist each of the local Progress Teams in realizing their unique visions. The Barker Mead Fund provided up to $20,000 in matching funds (dollar-for-dollar) for all contributions received prior to December 31, 2006.[6] Additionally, The Barker Mead Fund provided each of the seven fund committees with $5,000 in seed grant money to support small grants to illustrate the community-building intent of the funds while the campaigns were underway. Local Community Fund Committees work with and have been trained by Community Foundation staff so that they can create funding guidelines, review applications, and approve grants.

In addition to the generous private philanthropic support from the Barker Mead Fund, the federal appropriation, and grants from federal and state agencies, the Initiative has also attracted national attention from the foundation community. In February 2006, Community Progress Initiative received a $240,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to develop further the leadership skills of local residents. More recently, the Ford Foundation committed an additional $500,000 to support programming through 2009. Cornelia Butler Flora from the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development argues these initiatives – though co-sponsored with the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance – "have set a new benchmark of achievement for the civic engagement of community foundations."

Coordinating the Change Process

> So the community suffered initial shock over the sale [of the mill]. Then there was uncertainty and fear about what the sale was going to bring. Then when the reality of job cuts came, the morale of the community did indeed suffer. There was a lot of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth over the events that were occurring; so the Community Foundation and Heart of Wisconsin decided that something needed to be done. What we wanted to

[6] All seven communities met their goal and raised the money necessary to receive the full match.

> do was change the culture in the community from one of fear, uncertainty, and despair to a more hopeful kind of thing.

The above quote from a board member of the Community Foundation of South Wood County provides an appropriate overview for this section. The sale of the mill and the corresponding loss in employment had taken a toll on the community. Continuing to do nothing was no longer an option. The leadership[7] at the Community Foundation and the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance proactively capitalized on a number of simultaneous events and opportunities that ultimately led to the formation of the Community Progress Initiative. Moreover, a collective commitment to innovation and broad-based civic engagement along with a strong belief in the value of strategic philanthropy and a general benevolence for the common good provided what was needed to coordinate and lead change in this community. In this section, we provide information about those simultaneous events and also describe how the leadership at these two organizations mobilized the resources required to empower the citizenry to "carry the ball."

Concurrent Events and Opportunities

There were at least three major forces that coalesced as the Progress Initiative began to take shape. First, there was a profound belief among community members that "something" had to be done. It was time for people to "stop being angry and depressed." It was time to replace the "our community is dying…we may as well roll up the streets" attitude with one of hope, optimism, and determination. Of course there was some concern about how best to accomplish this task; yet nonetheless, "something" had to be done. As one person said, "Everybody

[7] In addition to a dedicated group of volunteers who serve on the board of directors and help to create an overall vision for their respective organizations as well as a collective vision for the Community Progress Initiative, Kelly Lucas serves the President and CEO of the Community Foundation and Connie Loden serves as the Executive Director of the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance.

recognized that a change had to happen, but we were unsure about what to do or how to do it;" and that's where the leaders of the Community Foundation and Heart of Wisconsin came in.

> You know there are really two catalysts – Kelly with the Community Foundation and Connie with the Heart of Wisconsin. I honestly don't think it could have launched without the two of them. Kelly is visionary. She is also skilled in leadership and management and funding and grants…Connie brings a great wealth of experience in the area of economic development…

Time and time again people praised Kelly and Connie for their vision, their support, and their commitment to persevering with the efforts.

> I think they provide the structure…I see Kelly and Connie's role as keeping us on task in a positive way. Not saying 'what the heck is going on? – You have not had a meeting lately,' but to be there if we have a problem…You have to have somebody committed to providing the structure. I mean it's not even an iffy thing. You have to have that because any time there is change or whenever you present a new idea it can get ugly, it can get scary, it can get down right depressing at times…Even though change might be what we really want and for our own good it can be so difficult [when you are right] in the middle of it and you just want to quit. So you need…a group, a committee, an individual or two who are committed to staying that long course.

The second significant change taking place in the community was one of organizational transformation at the Heart of Wisconsin and at the Community Foundation. Both organizations were in the process of reinventing themselves. The Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Development Alliance was a relatively new organization created just before the launch of the Progress Initiative when the local economic development organization and the Chamber of Commerce merged. The Heart of Wisconsin had recently hired Connie Loden, a forward-thinking executive director, who advocated an integrated approach to economic development; a strategy that is gaining momentum in the field.

Those who study economic development have been writing more about the interdependence of community development and economic development. Although it has been

argued that such an approach may complicate evaluations of its impact or success, the underlying premise is that any improvement for the overall good of society ultimately promotes economic development (Anderson, et. al., 2006). Research published by the Progressive Policy Institute demonstrates that "good public education, R&D infrastructure, availability of job-specific skills training, quality of life, quality government, and innovative economic development efforts" contribute to broad income growth (Atkinson, Court, & Ward, 1999, 38).

This more "progressive" approach to economic development emphasizes adaptation, creativity, and continuous commitment to innovation as essential in promoting job creation. As Atkinson, Court, and Ward (1999) note, what's needed is to overhaul traditional approaches to economic development (focusing on physical infrastructure, gap financing, marketing, and tax incentives) in favor of promoting entrepreneurial growth. Specifically, the authors note that fast-growing entrepreneurial firms will be the source of future job growth, and they encourage government to discontinue business relocation strategies. Although the advice offered by Atkinson and his colleagues is specifically geared toward state governments, their insights are also quite applicable at the local level. For example, the authors state "In the New Economy, states need to shift their focus from 'hunting and gathering' (industrial recruitment) to 'gardening' (promoting growth from within)" (1999, 38). This sentiment is at the heart of the work being done through the Community Progress Initiative as citizens are encouraged and supported in their entrepreneurial efforts to capitalize on community assets.

Connie Loden is a staunch advocate of an integrated community economic development approach. Through her experience domestically (at the local, state, and national level) and abroad she recognizes that a variety of programming focused on promoting entrepreneurial growth and empowering citizens is synergistic and "opens up new ways of thinking for people."

Her vision is clearly shared with others, including David Beurle from Innovative Leadership Australia, an Australian-based company that specializes in innovative approaches to local and regional community economic development. Connie was instrumental in establishing an early relationship with David, who promoted a catalytic and holistic framework that ensures "all the critical elements in a community or region are working together to create a prosperous and vibrant future." David was the keynote speaker at the public launch of the project, led the community visioning sessions with the seven participating communities, and has returned the area to speak at subsequent community rallies. He also worked with community leadership to design, launch, and map the Industry cluster concept as well as the Entrepreneurial Boot Camps.

At the same time the Heart of Wisconsin was undergoing its transition, Kelly Lucas, a truly visionary CEO was engaging the board and staff at the Community Foundation of South Wood County in lively debates about what it would mean if the Community Foundation were to assume the role of a social change agent. As one board member recalled,

> It is due chiefly to Kelly's vision of what a Community Foundation ought to be as a catalyst for community change. I think initially the Community Foundation…was a check writing organization, you know writing checks for people who requested grants – isn't that nice. But Kelly had a different vision; I think largely because she had learned about the whole field of community foundations and began to see what could happen. Kelly's charisma, vision, and talents are infectious so we began to search out people [to serve on the board] who had the same vision and whose talents were what we needed to accomplish those goals.

As noted in the review of the literature, the field is asserting tremendous pressure urging community foundation peers to assume proactive community-focused leadership and to embrace a social change orientation. Faber and McCarthy describe "social change philanthropy" as the use of "foundation resources in support of labor and community organizing efforts that mobilize a broad base of citizens" (2005: 11). Moreover, they explain that the citizens and the

foundations that support them are "directly involved in the identification of social and environmental problems and the implementation of potential solutions" (Faber & McCarthy, 2005: 11). Our data clearly suggests that the Community Foundation of South Wood County is operating as an agent of social change. This was not always the case.

The Community Foundation had traditionally been a "charitable check writing institution" focused on growing and managing assets; that is until it publicly shed that persona and began its transition to that of a community leader. One of the earliest examples of the community foundation's leadership role occurred around the conversion of a vacated big-box retail store into a senior center that brought together "education, activities, and services into a one-stop facility." The community foundation played a key role in marshalling philanthropic support for the conversion as well as convening and facilitating focus groups among seniors and other community members to learn more about the feasibility of locating a senior center in the downtown area. It could be said that the community foundation "cut its teeth" on this project, recognizing that they could have a voice and play a central role in moving the community forward.

The community foundation's transition into a community leader continues to evolve through involvement in the Community Progress Initiative. What's particularly notable about the transition is that an overwhelming majority of the people we interviewed understood and could talk about the change. This awareness is quite unusual, we often hear practitioners and board members lamenting that the general public is relatively uninformed about the work being done through community foundations. That was certainly not the case in Wisconsin Rapids; not only were people familiar with the Community Foundation of South Wood County and its work,

they were also quite conversant about trends in the field. Consider this comment from a small business owner in the community:

> I think that community foundations in general seem to be changing from what their major role was in the past to what they are today. It seems to be a real positive thing because it [the community change role] truly is servicing a broader base of the community. The things they are doing now affect the community as a whole.

Although the shift in focus was not without angst (as discussed in the section on Overcoming Barriers), today the Community Foundation of South Wood County has "taken on a more strategic role in the community," and Kelly Lucas has "emerged as a nationally recognized voice…promoting community foundations as more than just grantmakers but really as leaders for social change." As might be expected, many of the strategies embraced by the Community Foundation are also consistent with the advice offered by Atkinson and his colleagues (1999). One Community Foundation board member explained it this way:

> Until the culture changes nothing in the community will change. Once the culture begins to shift, you take on a purposeful and strategic view of the future and how the community foundation can impact the community…the community foundation is designed to improve the quality of life in the community…it can most positively impact a community by focusing on how to improve the education of its work force and the job opportunities available for the people. People with self-sustaining jobs in a community take pressure off all the other social institutions whether it's judicial or law enforcement, or social service agencies. That is how we impact the community for the better; [we] create pathways for people to become economically self-sufficient and…develop strategies for leveraging resources to create the greatest positive affect in your community.

It is also important to note that both the Community Foundation and the Heart of Wisconsin were involved in inclusive strategic planning processes which resulted in a strong commitment to partnership. "Because both of us were involved in each other's strategic planning processes, we reached the conclusion that an intentional and formidable partnership

could make a tremendous difference in our ability to be successful in making a positive impact in our community."

The final major force in this community as the Progress Initiative took shape was the renewed interest in the community expressed by two major philanthropic families (direct descendents of the founder of Consolidated Papers). Although Ruth and Hartley Barker and Gilbert and Jaylee Mead no longer live in Wisconsin Rapids, both couples refer to the community as "home." Their philanthropic relationship with the community was rekindled in 2000 when the Barkers and Meads were in Wisconsin Rapids for the final annual meeting of Consolidated Papers. The day before Consolidated Paper's annual meeting was the annual meeting for the Community Foundation and both couples were in attendance. What makes this significant is that the Meads and the Barkers were inspired by what they heard. As a result, both couples made significant contributions to establish donor-advised funds which began their relationships with the Community Foundation.

The Meads learned that a new community performing arts center at the local high school did not have a performance quality piano. Given their love of music and their appreciation for the performing arts, the Meads not only offered to purchase a grand piano, they also underwrote the cost to send representatives from the school to the Steinway showroom in New York to make the instrument selection (Wallace, 2007). The relationship the Meads established with the Community Foundation at that annual meeting has continued to flourish. For example, in the early planning stages of what was to become the Community Progress Initiative, a small group of community members traveled to Omaha to visit a rural revitalization project. Gilbert Mead surprised the group when he flew to Omaha and spent two days learning more about the work being done there. Three years ago, Gilbert Mead became a member of the Community

Foundation board of directors in part because he wanted to "give some support to courageous leadership to change the status quo."

Ruth and Hartley Barker's relationship with the Community Foundation also flourished after the annual meeting. The Barkers were looking for "something to do with" their family foundation. They recognized that they were aging and that arrangements had to be made for the perpetual life of their foundation. As Ruth recalled, "someone had recommended the Arizona Community Foundation as a possibility" (the couple has lived in Scottsdale, Arizona for the past 35 years). However, when the couple attended the annual meeting of the Community Foundation they were overcome with nostalgia and pride, and the ultimate fate of their foundation was sealed. Ruth explained,

> We sat in that annual meeting and looked around the room and these were people that we had grown up with. We knew the people in the room. We knew the people on the board of directors. This is where the money that we were going to be giving away came from, the majority of the money, the corpus of the money came from that area...we began thinking about it and decided this is where the money should go. We talked to Kelly and put the money with the Community Foundation.

Ruth Barker also agreed to serve on the Community Grants Committee.

Without a doubt, the Barker's and the Mead's relationship with the Community Foundation has evolved over time. They have been instrumental in providing contributions that supported south Wood County projects such as the construction of a senior center, a domestic abuse center, a cancer treatment center, and in the case of the Meads, a community theater now under construction that will bear their name. In 2004, the couples joined forces to establish the Barker Mead Fund, a designated community improvement and capacity-building fund whose contributions to date have totaled $3.1 million with an endowment component forthcoming that will assure substantial support for the perpetual administration of the foundation. Moreover, the

fund will underwrite the cost of providing a reduced administrative fee structure to assure competitiveness, promote greater collaboration among nonprofits in endowment building, and increase participation from citizens of all income levels.

As previously mentioned, the Barker Mead Fund has provided critical start-up money for the Community Progress Initiative by providing an initial gift of $5,000 for grantmaking and $20,000 in match money to each of the seven *Progress Funds*. The Fund has also provided financial support to the Community Foundation which has increased staff capacity, implemented professional development training, underwritten an administrative fee reduction, created a nonprofit resource center, and renovated the foundation's office building. Ownership of the building will transfer to the Community Foundation upon Gilbert Mead's death.

While it is true that the Barkers and the Meads have been a major philanthropic force in the community, it is important to know that their financial gifts come without strings. Their ultimate goal is to engage and empower citizens so that the community can strengthen and expand the local economy. One Community Foundation board member expressed this common perspective:

> I think the Barkers and Meads have been very intentional and direct about their love for this community and their desire to help this community; but they have never come in and said 'this is what we want you to do and this is how we want you to do it.' But rather, they have said, 'we all have a close affiliation with the community. We've been fortunate to have resources. We want to help the community. Tell us what you need.'

The above quote not only provides important insight regarding the concern two families have expressed for the future of this community, it also highlights the centrality of civic engagement – a defining characteristic of the Community Progress Initiative. A number of people, in their own ways explained that "there is a place for everyone at the table" and that the people must "carry the ball." Nonetheless, the work being done through the Initiative needed to

be coordinated and managed. In the remaining pages of this section we explain the Initiative's success in engaging citizens so they could create the cultural change necessary to plan a new future. Our most perceptive finding is that leadership is not synonymous with agenda setting; it's inclusive, facilitative, and empowering.

Leading Change

Although some interviewees expressed concern that the Progress Initiative might create an alternative form of dependency, from the very beginning "it has always been by the community for the community." An explicit commitment to broad community involvement and a concerted effort to disperse power are omnipresent. As one person said, "You can't ignore anybody. You've got to contact everybody. You've got to get everybody to think about this and say, 'I am part of this community.'" This same person also nicely articulated common concerns related to the concentration of power that had historically dominated community decision making:

> One of my fears was that this [the Initiative] would be seen as some kind of elites rich boys, let's-get-more-giveaways-for-business kind of a thing, rather than a community building type of a thing. It has become a community building thing. It's actually gotten everybody in the community involved and that's key. You've got to help people understand, 'we want you involved, and we value your input.'

Generally speaking, people who were involved in the work of the Initiative felt welcome and appreciated. Every citizen was expected to participate – from the donors who provided philanthropic support to the business owners who offered perspective and advice. Additionally, young people, senior citizens, those who were employed, and those who were unemployed were all invited to share their thoughts about how to build a prosperous local economy and revitalize the community. "I felt very welcome as part of the group. I felt valued for what I could

bring…At that point [the time this person became involved] I didn't represent a business downtown. I was just a concerned citizen."

People were also quite appreciative of the ways that the Community Foundation and the Heart of Wisconsin provided administrative support for Initiative efforts. In particular particpants expressed gratitude for assistance with meeting arrangements (scheduling, space, and snacks). "We are very fortunate that the Community Foundation is in a supportive role…having a meeting and not needing to figure out who is going to pay for the coffee and cookies is really important. Their involvement takes a tremendous amount of that garbage out of the way." The work done to promote and bring visibility to the Initiative was also acknowledged. People talked about the website, email updates, newsletters, progress reports, newspaper articles, and the buttons created to promote awareness of the Community Progress Initiative. "Did you see those buttons that a lot of the really active people wear? Well, that was a simple thing to let people know what's going on. I remember former Mayor Bach was always wearing that button. He always had on that button."

Kelly and Connie were credited also with leading change rather than following a predetermined course of action. One person likened them to directors of an orchestra. Another said "they were very intentional in creating the playing field, but they refrained from side-line coaching and directing traffic." Still another explained,

> They have provided the spark for this thing, but [they are] not the sole motivating force, not the sole driver, not the sole organizer…Under the best of circumstances you find that person who provides the spark and then that person finds other people to carry the ball. It's like I said before, ultimately it's the people who have to carry this thing forward. That's how we make a difference.

Above all else, both women were continually recognized and consistently appreciated for having the courage, skill, and tenacity needed to coordinate the change process.

> I just feel like the two agencies that have done this have taken a big risk in a really negative climate…both [Kelly and Connie] are willing to handle criticism or negative evaluation for the betterment of the community, and I really respect them for that. They really worked hard to make our community a place where people want to live and work. They have really created a place for anyone who wants to get involved to be a part of something, to give back to their community, and I really value that. It's been a wonderful experience. I've met wonderful people that I never would have met if I hadn't been involved and I really value that as well.

It is important to remember that even though Kelly and Connie have been the public "faces" of the Initiative, the tremendous transformation taking place in the region could not have been accomplished without the will and the work of the people; this includes the support staff at the Community Foundation and the Heart of Wisconsin. Although it was an engaged citizenry that has been ultimately responsible for building the local economy and creating an entrepreneurial self-reliant culture, the "behind the scenes" infrastructure building activities have been largely coordinated by staff. Staff members have assisted community members with their efforts in a number of ways including publicizing and arranging meetings, communicating with important constituencies, facilitating access to resources, and providing basic training in all aspects of community foundation administration to the various *Community Fund Committees*. We believe it is essential to recognize and appreciate their contribution. One of our informants concurred, "You know the drum major is the one who gets credit for the band, but I think sometimes all that tells people is that the drum major is pretty good not how great the band is."

Overcoming Barriers

An important part of this research was not only to better understand the barriers inherent in implementing broad-based community change, but also to learn more about the role the Community Foundation of South Wood County played in overcoming these obstacles. Our data suggest that three fundamental concerns needed to be addressed in order to initiate community

change. First, it was essential to address the prevailing culture of entitlement that had given rise to complacency and an inability to challenge the status quo. Second, it was important to clearly specify and define economic development. And finally, it was crucial to be responsive to people's fears – fear of taking a chance and the related possibility of failure; fear of competition; and fear related to the length of the time the process would take to produce measurable results. These obstacles are discussed in more detail in the section that follows.

Entitlement

Overcoming what was described as an "attitude of entitlement" or a "culture of dependency" that had been cultivated for more than 100 years was essential to implementing a new vision for the region. As one person said, "This community has relied on one or two families to support it forever and just getting out of that mindset is going to be interesting." Another said, "the entitlement that has burdened this community is a burden to it now…the sugar daddies and sugar mommas are not there anymore. They just aren't."

Although there were those who questioned the paternalistic motives of the paper mill owners, the overall consensus was that these "one or two families" had the best interests of the community and the people at heart. We heard story after story about how local nonprofits and community members would turn to these central families for everything from park benches to guaranteed employment, even in times of great economic turmoil.

> There was one family that even in the depression would have people work even if there wasn't work. They had them come in for ten hours so they have always looked after their workers forever and ever and ever. So you've got a culture that is used to that kind of big brother approach. *Good* big brother not *bad*, and so the culture of the work force was these people [Stora Enso, the new mill owners] would be the same way, and obviously they can't be because they're a big world-wide company.

Another person told us even when it was apparent technological innovations could be implemented that would cut costs by reducing labor, the "family" would not replace workers with machines. This person further explained it was his understanding that the family recognized the ways in which they had financially benefited from the mill and was more than generous in sharing that wealth (in the form of guaranteed wages) with the workers.

In spite of any intended benevolence, a number of unintended and somewhat destructive consequences occurred. The community had become "dependent, risk adverse, homogeneous, and quite insular…resulting in significant inequities in power, leadership, and socioeconomic stratification." As previously mentioned, the community was frequently described as a "paper-making city, with good jobs, good benefits, and life-long employment." Employment at the mill was regarded as a "right" – "your dad worked at the mill, your grandpa worked at the mill, and when you were ready to work your dad asks his foreman to get you an interview…and you have a really good life."

This mindset was so entrenched that many parents saw little value in sending their children to college. As one person explained, "Why would they send [their children] away to college to make $35,000 as a teacher and yet at 18 years of age [their children] could walk into the mill and make $45,000 or $50,000 in year one?" Our data clearly suggest that the economic engine driving this community was the paper mill, which had created an over-reliance and dependency on a social and economic structure no one was eager to change. It is often the case however, that structures change in response to environmental stimuli and in spite of people's preferences; such was the case in Wisconsin Rapids.

The paper-making industry, by all accounts underwent tremendous change in the mid-1990s affecting a number of communities across the United States. As one person noted,

"immediately after a boom year in 1995, it was a crash year and the industry has not been the same since." Another explained,

> If you study paper, what happened in this community happened in every other paper making community ten years before this; so it's really no surprise that this was going to happen. It was just a matter of when it would eventually hit us. So now we sit in a very competitive environment with regard to paper and all the industries that supply that business.

In effect, the predictability of this community and the certainty within which it operated was pulled out from under them. Feelings of helpless, confusion, anger, and hurt permeated the citizenry. For many, the sale of the mill was a personal affront, a violation of the implicit commitment they believed the owners had made to this community. Due in part to the over-reliance on this single industry and the insular thinking that was pervasive among the workforce, there was little recognition that changes taking place at "their mill" were simply a reflection of changes affecting the manufacturing industry worldwide.

Our informants told us stories of citizens who simply did not want to admit that times were changing, the high-paying mill jobs were history, and the future of the community rested on creating an innovative business-friendly culture that capitalized on entrepreneurial thinking and new business development. As one young person we spoke to explained, "I just think that people want those mill jobs back and so they don't want to see Home Depot come in...they don't want Cold Stone or Starbucks…they want to see all those jobs go back to the mill." It seems perfectly reasonable to yearn for the mill jobs that supported a comfortable lifestyle, especially in light of what we learned regarding the pay structure and tenure at the mill, and what we know about the starting salaries in the service industry.

A quick glance at the classified section reveals that starting salaries for those seeking service-related jobs at places like Cold Stone Creamery or Starbucks tend to hover around

minimum wage. Moreover, these jobs are typically part-time and generally do not provide benefits. This means that at best, people employed in service-related jobs could expect a starting salary somewhere around $15,000/year; a far cry from the "$65,000 a year to press a green button" that was previously earned at the mill. Although this quote may be an overstatement of reality, the point is that people in this community had become accustomed to and expected high-paying jobs that were essentially guaranteed for life in spite of any industry trends or technological advances. Many refused to believe that a prosperous local economy could be built by nurturing small business. "I'm going to be extremely blunt…I don't think that startup of a whole pile of retail or service sector small businesses, will do it…we need [a manufacturing firm] to add 500 jobs."

Resistance to change was expressed also in terms of concerns relating to the altering of existing "power structures" that would ultimately affect "how decisions are made in the community." People described south Wood County as a "fractured" community in terms of geography, ideology, and socioeconomic status. They talked about "eastsiders" and "westsiders" divided by a river. They spoke of the "blue-nose old-money types" as being socially and economically separate from the mill workers and the professionals not born and raised in the area. They talked about the "old boy's network" and explained that many decisions affecting the welfare of the community were made at dinner parties without input from those whose lives were ultimately affected. As one person said, the success of the Community Progress Initiative was based on a "widely engaged community" one that could threaten the "taller structure…the old school connection." This person admitted that diluting a well-established and highly concentrated power structure could be "a little unsettling in terms of [knowing] who's in charge

and who's running the show, [and that as a result] you may end up with a few people who try to play their hands."

Although there have been instances when people "played their hands," the Community Progress Initiative has been instrumental in changing the idea that "someone will do this for us" to one of "we can do this ourselves." Much of this success can be attributed to the breadth of community involvement and an overt expectation that people will look internally for solutions to their concerns. One person recalled his conversation with the director of the Heart of Wisconsin:

> You have got to start doing your job here. People need to quit looking at the tops of their shoes. We need some press out there about the good things that are happening in our community instead of continually focusing on the one thing that happened. Six or seven months later I got a call back from her telling me put 'your money where your mouth is' and asking me to be a co-chairman [of one of the clusters].

Defining Economic Development

A second major obstacle to overcome was how to define economic development. Reaching consensus about the kinds of activities that "counted" as economic development and specifying the role of the community foundation in its implementation proved to be quite difficult.

One of the four key findings of a recent report published by Carnegie Mellon University regarding the role of foundations in economic development was "a dramatic lack of consensus around the definition of 'economic development'" (Anderson, et.al., 2006, 9). The authors note that consistently in each of the six regions they studied there were two distinct conceptualizations of economic development. The first they labeled a "traditional" approach which emphasized business attraction, retention, and growth; the other they referred to as a "progressive" approach, which merged economic and community development together. We found evidence of these

very same factions in south Wood County as well. Consider the following two comments about how to define economic development.

> I would define economic development as creating a community that is interested in the assistance and establishment of businesses in your community and that isn't afraid – and in fact is excited about – using town resources, public money for private benefit; making it such that a business can come in and locate here have some advantages, have a reason for locating here and therefore create jobs which trickles down…Economic development is a business and it's a competitive business. You're not going to attract businesses to this community if you're are not out there proactively seeking these opportunities when you hear about them, and offering packages that will entice them to locate here rather than somewhere else…
>
> Community development and economic development [are] linked together and [we needed to] create that understanding in people. We need to take charge of our own future verses thinking that we can still rely on someone else saving us or there's going to be some big factory that drops here out of the sky and will be our silver bullet that saves the community. [The reality is that] because of global economics, traditional approaches to economic development are changing.

By definition the Community Progress Initiative advocated a more progressive approach to economic development, which drew sharp criticism from the traditionalists who believed that implementation dollars were wasted on "all this feel good stuff." As one staunch supporter of the Initiative explained, "I think there are some people who think it was probably a waste of money 'we don't have that kind of money to spend on something like this. Why are we spending money on this when we need jobs…This isn't going to help us.'" These sentiments were echoed by someone less enthusiastic about the Initiative. Consider this comment.

> There were some people and I guess that would include myself in that group that felt that the resources that the Foundation and the Heart of Wisconsin and other groups had at their disposal were not being directed in the way that could be most meaningful to help further and create economic development in the community. The Progress Initiative seemed to some of us to be more attitudinal, which again was great as far as it went, but there were some very noticeable holes that we didn't think were being addressed…if some of that funding would have been used to provide grants

> to downtown business owners for example to improve their property or other things that would be more immediately tangible that that would A) help the attitude of the community and B) foster more development sooner and that's been I think the crux of the people who have not been 100% hoorah rah about this thing. [People were concerned] that the resources were not being used to the best of their advantage and that some of the groups sort of missed what economic development is and what it takes.

These divergent definitions of economic development affected not only the Initiative's implementation but also how its success would be measured. Not surprisingly, for those community members who advanced a traditional approach to economic development, the only thing that "counted" were business-attraction strategies and quantifiable results (e.g., the number of jobs created). Those advocating a more progressive approach recognized "a great influx of manufacturing jobs isn't going to happen" and admitted their measures of success were "softer" because for them, the first step in sustainable economic development was to shift community attitudes from despair and skepticism to excitement and hope. For the progressive folks, success was about developing a "stronger confidence level in people who are looking to start a business" or who were looking to expand opportunities that already existed by providing those people with the skills necessary to "on their own carry these efforts forward."

What we found quite interesting was the circular argument advanced by the traditional economic development advocates--particularly around what should not be attributed to the Initiative. For example, at least three of the people we spoke to expressed concerns about the degree to which the Community Progress Initiative could be credited with playing a role in decisions related to two new businesses start-ups (in particular, Home Depot and the Ocean Spray plant). On the one hand, this group argued that there was not "enough documentation to say that the Initiative had a hill of beans to do with those jobs being created. There were far more factors involved than *that* Initiative." Yet, these same people would elaborate on the kinds

of things that they believed influenced the decision-making such as "changing the culture" and creating an environment that is "welcoming new businesses to a community that wants them."

What's important here is that prior to the Initiative, our informants explained that the community climate was so depressing it was unlikely that any major business would seek to locate in Wisconsin Rapids. Time after time we heard people talk about the pre-Initiative negative attitudes, the "doom and gloom," that loomed over the community, and the community's almost certain path to the "dumper." Even those not very enthusiastic about the Initiative admitted that the Initiative had rejuvenated the community and generated optimism, pride, and community spirit – all of which were likely to be attractive to any business seeking to locate in an area. So while it may be true that these new businesses chose to locate in Wisconsin Rapids for any number of reasons, it seems completely unreasonable to ignore the role the Initiative played in creating the environment in which companies such as Home Depot and the Ocean Spray plant would choose to locate.

Managing People's Fear

The final obstacle that needed to be overcome was managing people's fear. Fear manifested in three key ways: fear of taking a chance and failing; fear of competition; and fear related to time. As previously noted, an over-reliance on the paper industry had created a compliant, risk adverse citizenry who not only resisted change but also was quite fearful of change. Consider this insightful comment,

> I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that as a community member or as a business owner or an employee you're watching everything be pulled out from underneath you. Economic downturn, job instability: the rug has just been ripped out from underneath you and when that happens, people have a tendency, I think, to grab a hold of anything they can. This is my turf, my area, no one is going to take it away from me. No one is going to change it. No one is going to do anything. It's mine. I'm in my bubble and I'm protected and it makes them feel safe. So when someone comes to them

> and says something along the lines of 'we have this great initiative you know we really need everybody get on board. We're going to work together to move the community forward.' You're like, 'okay well if I come out of my bubble is someone else going to come in and take it away from me? Is someone going to do this to me again?'

Fear of taking a risk was also evident at the community foundation. As noted in the review of the literature, there is considerable discussion about the "proper" role of a community foundation. The Community Foundation of South Wood County had historically assumed the role of a "charitable check-writer" consistent with what Leonard (1989) and others would call a donor-service approach. The transition toward assuming a more proactive social change role was not without considerable strife. The board was deeply divided on the issue, questioning whether the community foundation's role was to promote economic development or whether the primary focus should be on asset development and grantmaking. Only after months of challenging conversations and the departure of some board members (through resignation and expiring term-limits) did the foundation begin to transform its own culture so that it could assume a leadership role in the community's transformation process.

People were also quite fearful about competition. All too often people confused collaboration with competition. Concerns about sharing information with competitors made people hesitant about working together for the common good. Helping community members to understand that "everyone wins" when information is shared and people work together was a huge hurdle to clear. Yet, this kind of collaboration and interaction was essential to changing peoples' attitudes and the ultimate success of the Initiative. As one person commented,

> It truly is I think a matter of anxiety and going through the process of change and not realizing that you can build a mountain faster by working together than you can to build seven individual ones; I don't think people remember that [working together is more fruitful than working alone] when they're in the thick of a true crisis in their life. I really think it's a matter of turf protection and people are not quite ready to acknowledge that. We as a

> community never had to work together before. Why do we have to now? Why can't I stay in my bubble and hope that someone takes care of me?

And finally, our informants expressed fear related to time in two key ways. First, they worried that the initial work being undertaken by those involved with the Initiative was too labor intensive, placing a difficult burden on folks who were "already going to 15 meetings." And second, they were fearful about losing momentum particularly because this kind of change is incremental, not always apparent to those most intimately involved, and only realized after a significant amount of time. As one person explained,

> It can't be done quickly. It can be done incrementally…it will happen in five to ten years minimally if you want this kind of significant change to occur, but you do have to sustain people until it happens. It's hard for them to step out of themselves and see themselves and to be able to recognize and celebrate the changes that have been made. Instead they're saying 'well we haven't gotten there yet so we failed or haven't got there yet; is it really worth doing what we're doing?...'

Although often not explicit, many of those we interviewed who were involved with the work of the Community Progress Initiative recognized the risks associated with failure. Even though those in leadership roles were driven by a true belief that nurturing the entrepreneurial climate in the town would thereby "transfer ability and skills to the local people [so they are] able to pick up and run themselves;" the fear of failing was a reality that could not be ignored. When asked to elaborate on risk, one community member responded

> Getting people's hope up and then not delivering. I mean, to me that's it… nothing is worse than that. It could be devastating. And then once that happens, the credibility is gone. Then you'll never get it back; so there's always risk of that sort.

Community Perception

As previously noted, the Community Progress Initiative is an innovative, inclusive, collaborative effort to capitalize on the community's existing resources to build the local

economy, create an entrepreneurial self-reliant culture, and stimulate broad civic engagement to generate plans for the future. We found considerable evidence to suggest that there has been noticeable success in each of these areas. In this section we describe efforts to engage and empower community members, explain how residents have learned more about and promoted local assets, and provide information about the Initiative's successes to date.

Engaging and Empowering Citizens

> We weren't a community that was prepared to make our own decisions because in the past if you needed something, or needed someone to sponsor this or do that, the paper company stepped forward. Their executives were in all the leadership positions; so if something needed to be torn down or built up, they were the ones to kind of make the decisions.

The Community Progress Initiative has been instrumental in shaping a new vision for the region, shifting the culture from one of dependence with highly concentrated power to one of self-reliance with dispersed power where equity and inclusion are valued. By way of town hall meetings, community picnics, a speaker's series, leadership training, study tours, and strategic philanthropy, people are learning more about their neighbors, their communities, and how others have become skilled at negotiating conflict to encourage "looking at the positives and letting go of the negatives." What follows is information about the ways that this type of outreach has contributed to an engaged citizenry and promoted an entrepreneurial self-reliant culture.

Consistently we heard that the community was transitioning. "We had to learn how to take back our community and make our own decisions, and be part of our own economic development, and find the job growth…" Many individuals specifically credited the work done through the Initiative as instrumental in shifting attitudes in ways that have fostered an inclusive, engaged citizenry who is now empowered to take responsibility for creating sustainable changes in the local community.

> …this is your community, this is our community. We can make it happen together--encouraging citizens to take ownership of their community not give it away to someone else to create for them…I think they did a good job of inviting people, and continuing to invite people to the table, and then allowing them to take the next step themselves.

A valuable and frequently mentioned aspect of this cultural shift was a general openness to asking for help and learning from others. A number of the people we interviewed talked about how tremendously valuable things such as the study tours, guest speakers, and leadership training have been in generating enthusiasm and building trust. As one person told us, the initial visit to Nebraska to meet with community foundation leaders and others involved with implementing a comprehensive approach to long-term rural community sustainability that included a 'wealth transfer analysis', provided participants with "optimism" and "energy." Another individual said the study tours are a "huge success that really gets the blood flowing. It got me motivated, saying 'hey there's a lot of things we could be doing here.'" People spoke just as enthusiastically about the initial kickoff meeting when David Beurle from Innovative Leadership Australia spoke about the importance of linking community development with economic development and how such an approach is working in other parts of the world.

Our informants also spoke quite favorably about the benefits associated with inviting guest speakers to share their experiences, their research, and their expertise with members of the community. One person elaborated, "they are doing a great job staying on top of things and they have a nice way of inviting the right people at the right time." This person went on to explain that an upcoming speaker was planning to talk about the importance of leadership in the area of education. Interestingly, the timing of this speaker coincided with a rather divisive issue surrounding recent school board elections.

Perhaps one of the most powerful programs in the Community Progress Initiative is the adaptive skill training provided by Ki Thoughtbridge through the *Advanced Leadership Institute*. Administered by the community foundation, the *Institute* offers an Integrated Model of Leadership, combining the concepts of community stewardship with the skills training necessary to lead change, and the tools required for managing conflict constructively. This Integrated Model connects the character and competence of leaders within a larger context where communities must adapt in order to thrive.

> There's some real value in having someone who can communicate and lead a hard conversation that's challenging your community. It can be very hard to do as a local person and even a local community leader. Now you can occasionally get people [in your community] who are very good at doing this regardless…quite often it's a bit easier to have that tough conversation, to call people to action, when it's not your neighbor saying 'look you need to step up.'

Each of these programs offers community members the opportunity to benefit from the experiences and expertise of others; elaborates more about what's happening outside the region and its applicability to the work being done in south Wood County; and provides participants with the motivation, determination, and the skills necessary to engage a broad group of stakeholders in changing the culture.

Another way citizens were engaged and empowered was through the adoption and promotion of collective and strategic (proactive) philanthropy. Such an approach gave power to local citizens who assumed responsibility not only for raising charitable dollars in their communities, but also for making collective decisions about how that money would be spent. The *Progress Funds* and the $35,000 in seed money ($5,000 in each community) were essential in this regard. One person was quite articulate about the value of these funds:

> I think [the *Progress Funds*] added a lot of value in a number of ways. One, as you look at creating the self reliant culture, it plays a role in sending

> a message. People learn that philanthropy and decision making [related to how those funds are allocated] on a local level gives the community a much greater sense of self-reliance…It also has made a difference in regards to different people taking on leadership positions in the communities. It has given them a reason to rally together to raise the funds and again recognized that they have some self-reliant ability to raise money…but even more so, that they have the control in utilizing those funds in a way that they feel is most appropriate for the priorities that they have established in their community.

Promoting Local Assets

> We are our own worst enemies a good share of the time often times not utilizing the resources that are right around us, and in my opinion I think this particular initiative has helped draw together resources that have been here all along. We just haven't chosen to tap them. One of the largest things that came out of this initiative that I've seen…is an assessment of what we have and realization of what we have in our community. We all have the tendency to take for granted what is around us, what is common place to us and until we take some of those bus tours or until we talk to other leaders in other areas or until we get conversation going between different community leaders sometimes we don't realize what we have right underneath our feet.

Time and time again, the people we spoke to offered some version of the above quote, whether it was by proudly quoting the numbers of small businesses that had been operating in the community along side the paper mill, boasting about the quality of area schools, drawing attention to the region's natural resources, or touting the merits of living in or retiring to a small town with a desirable quality of life. The sale of the mill together with the decline in the cranberry market and the corresponding loss of jobs had completely paralyzed this community. The residents were so focused on "looking at the tops of their shoes" that they were unable to see all that was "right underneath their feet."

The industry clusters have been extremely important in helping people not only to recognize and appreciate existing resources, but also in providing the expertise and vision needed to promote and cultivate these local assets. Although occasionally concerns about competition

needed to be addressed, the clusters provided an excellent opportunity to implement a number of community and economic development strategies that helped existing business owners overcome obstacles and assisted entrepreneurs in obtaining the resources necessary for business development. As someone said, "you would be amazed at the cross-pollination that occurs when you get business people talking." This person shared a story of a local company that was shipping raw materials to Seattle for processing. Unbeknown to corporate decision-makers was a local mill that could have done the same processing and saved the company money on shipping fees. The person credited the Initiative with creating a new venue for dialogue in which local capacity could be promoted. The company has since stopped processing raw materials in Seattle in favor of sending that same business to the local mill.

What we found particularly interesting was the ways in which the interaction between and among these clusters has evolved over time. While it may have been the case that each cluster was focused around a specific function such as agriculture or downtown revitalization, it did not take long for cluster members to recognize the local and regional benefits of collaboration. A number of the cluster members we spoke to placed work specific to their cluster within the broader context of other work being done in the community. For example, a member of the tourism cluster explained the benefits of working with the local Progress Teams to determine the best placement for visitor kiosks. "It would be impossible for me to go to Vesper and say there's where your kiosk needs to go. They know their traffic flows. They know where the visitors ask questions. They know what's important to them. They need to tell us, so it's a nice relationship." This informant went on to explain the "interconnectedness" of tourism and the importance of thinking "inclusively."

> Most people think tourism impacts small business [but maybe they are unfamiliar with] how tourism impacts a local banker. Well, when you find

> an entrepreneur relocating to the area because of a positive experience they had when they visited, that impacts that local banker. The town of Rome is a growing area for retirement homes so that's impacting real estate. Our tourism is impacting real estate. It's impacting the bank. It's impacting the businesses that are coming here because we now have a group of residents that have very high disposable income. The trouble is people don't necessarily think about that [the interconnectedness] when they're stuck in their one industry.

Others focused on the notion that local development promotes regional growth. As one person said, "if we take the approach that we're just going to make [one town] succeed, we lose sight of the fact that anything good in the region benefits us all." The *Progress Teams* played an important role in identifying local assets that were desirable to certain constituent groups. For example, people talked about the lakeside community's appeal to retirees. Others talked about the natural beauty of the area and its attractiveness to outdoor enthusiasts. Still others talked about the history and heritage associated with the paper making and cranberry industries. Again, what's important to understand is the ideas, plans, and tactics devised to create new opportunities and take advantage of existing strengths have never been externally mandated; rather every strategy has emerged "from the ground up," engaging hundreds of citizens in identifying and promoting the unique aspects of their individual communities.

One particularly noteworthy observation is that by empowering people to "take control" and by explicitly recognizing the value of collaborative work, more and more people have become involved. While a core group of committed community members established the foundation on which the Community Progress Initiative has been built, the existing structure is more complex, more integrated, and more inclusive than perhaps even the initial visionaries might have predicted.

Early Indicators of Success

> The most important thing the Progress Initiative has done for the community is provide a way for every single resident to feel a part of a future. It has provided hope, relief, success. I think that hope is what drives so many people and I would say that that is the biggest success. I'm going to cry. That is the biggest success for the Progress Initiative. It has provided hope for the community.

Consistent with a more progressive approach to economic development, the Community Progress Initiative advanced many different ideas and programs that were designed to improve society. A particular emphasis was placed on engaging citizens in building on existing resources to strengthen and expand the local economy, creating an entrepreneurial self-reliant culture, and planning for the future. Critics of such an approach may assert that because a community-economic development approach is so all-encompassing, determining metrics for success is problematic. The people we spoke to did not share these concerns and most credited the work of the Initiative with "rejuvenating this community." As one person said, "all of the sudden people are thinking, 'yes you know, this is a pretty nice place on the planet and we should be proud of it. We should be proud of it, let's make it better and let's go out and promote it.'"

Much of the success is directly related to how people are communicating across historically entrenched geographical, ideological, industry-related, and socioeconomic boundaries. It's not that the boundaries no longer exist, but rather community members are finding ways to put the past into perspective. Through cross-cluster collaboratives, industry-specific networking, government partnerships, and true commitment to work and converse with people in new and different ways, the residents of south Wood County and the Town of Rome are "making it happen."

> I'm sure you've had experiences with communities who truly have had a very adversarial relationship and we really have. There are things that people say, 'I remember 18 years ago the city did this and by God and it

> can't be ignored.' Now we don't want to dwell on it, but we need to acknowledge that it is there because we're not going to be able to get anything done regionally until we truly have some collaboration and we're starting to come along in that…to toot our own horn, I think we have come a long way in building bridges between our three communities.

We heard stories of village boards and town boards close in geographical proximity that "for the first time ever in history" had come together to talk about common interests and shared needs. We heard stories about how people who tired of the negative attitudes and persistent cynicism have worked to engage the skeptics by listening to their concerns, focusing on common interests, and encouraging involvement. Consider this comment,

> I had talked to this young gentleman…you know we were sitting at one of the bars downtown and he was saying, 'well we should be doing this and we should be doing that.' I said, 'those are all great ideas, you know there is a downtown cluster talking about that and looking at that. You've got some great stuff there, instead of whining about it in a bar why don't you go and contact the Heart of Wisconsin and tell them you want to get involved.' He accepted my challenge and I saw him a few weeks later and he said he was having a ball doing it. He really saw the community in a different light. In one individual case, you turned cynicism around to optimism.

The overall impression we reached was that people in the community are pleased about the change in attitude and attributed much of that change to the Community Progress Initiative, "People are actually starting to talk to each other about things that affect all of their lives and probably for the first time in a meaningful way...that just didn't happen before."

With regard to planning for the future, we asked those we interviewed what they thought might happen in year four (remember the Initiative was launched as a three-year program). The overwhelming response was that the work would continue. And most said that because the Initiative had been structured in a way that "generates its own momentum" and even though the Community Foundation and the Heart of Wisconsin has provided the structure, "it's the people who have to carry this thing forward to make a difference." One person offered these thoughts:

> I really think it will keep going on. It may be called something else and maybe different people will be involved, but it will just keep going on. I think the whole key to this thing is that it is for the community and by the community, and now we have a true sense of what community means. The Progress Initiative is an epic not an event.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Over the past ten months we have conducted site visits in south Wood County, interviewed dozens of people, and collected volumes of valuable data that has helped us to understand how one rural community foundation worked with others in the community to implement broad-based community change. Our insights regarding this process have produced important findings with practical value for community foundation leadership throughout the country, particularly with regard to the importance of modeling the behavior that is expected of others. Leadership (both board and staff) at the Community Foundation and the Heart of Wisconsin engaged in an unprecedented collaborative partnership, crossing boundaries and working together to realize a common vision for the community. Their reflections about this process have been reflected throughout this document and their recommendations are summarized in the pages that follow. Moreover, a number of other people we interviewed offered useful guidance for others who are committed to strengthening, stabilizing, and empowering communities and may also be considering similar initiatives in their communities. In this final section we detail the implications of our work and share advice offered from those engaged in creating community change.

Communicate

The Community Progress Initiative enjoys tremendous support from the local media. The newspaper dedicated space to promoting events and publishing information about what's happening in each of the communities, the local cable channel airs a weekly program produced

by the Heart of Wisconsin, and the local am radio station runs a weekly program highlighting the accomplishments of local entrepreneurs. This media support has been essential in promoting local outreach and keeping citizens informed. Yet, we were continuously reminded that communication is "a two-way street."

While the people we interviewed were quick to point out that it was essential to get people to "spread the word," and "toot your own horn," they were also quite adamant about the importance of "listening." In the words of one informant:

> We start by listening. So often we don't listen to each other and if we don't listen to each other how can we grow? How can we change where we're going? I've always found there's two things that you need to remember when you listen to the other person. Be respectful of what they're saying and there are no wrong comments about anything. Well if you create that respect then all of a sudden you can communicate better. It's hard to be mad at somebody when you now understand the issues. I think that's one of this Initiative's goals, to teach people to sit down and learn how to listen and communicate appropriately.

Get the "Right" People at the Table

One of the core goals of the Progress Initiative was to shift the culture from one of dependence with highly concentrated power to one of self-reliance with dispersed power. Broad civic engagement was essential to achieving this objective. "You know, you want this to bubble up from the grassroots. You can't start with the people of power – all you get from them is their blessing or a slap on the hand – if you start with the people who are really interested it can be fantastic." From the initial kickoff and the very first visioning sessions in each community, fostering citizen participation has been a priority.

> You can't do it on your own. There is no reason we need a castle in the sky telling the community 'you will do this.' We need the residents and the business owners and the interested parties to come forward and ask, 'hey what about this?'

An overwhelming majority of the people we interviewed told us that there was "space for everyone at the table." Of course, this makes it sound as if there was only one "table." In reality, there are many different "tables" where people with diverse interests, assorted skills, and various backgrounds can offer their advice, share expertise, and contribute resources in support of the common good. A common theme regarding these "tables" was the importance of including young people. Our data suggest that youth involvement is essential for at least two reasons. First, as many quickly pointed out that the ultimate fate of the community rests in the hands of the next generation. "Their opinion matters. We actually seek it out. We want to know what they're thinking. They are the future of the community." Second, a number of people saw the direct link between engaged teens and parent involvement: "I think the young people who have come through to a certain extent have sold the concept to the parents, and over the years we've seen more and more adult activity…"

Many of the people we interviewed believed that having the "right" people at the table in the earliest stages of the Initiative was essential to "making it happen." As one person said,

> …pulling all those experts together was the real crux of the entire Initiative. They pulled people from all over the community with expertise and interest in specific areas. [These people were] able to answer questions and do things to advance whatever particular project they're working on. That was critical. Pulling together all those experts that we have within the community to make these projects happen was absolutely key.

Having the "right" people at the table was also essential in carrying the work forward. Yet, as time went on, identification of those "right" people became an emergent process. People realized this in a couple of ways. Most importantly, they noted that even with vision, enthusiasm, and commitment, if the people who can make it happen are not at the table, great ideas may never come to fruition. As one person noted, "I mean there was a lot of vision for what it could be, but we didn't have all the pieces to get that further down the road. We didn't

have all the right people there. There are all these possibilities, but they are not necessarily going anywhere at this point."

Of course this lack of presence is an easy hurdle to clear; simply invite the people who have the resources needed to make it happen. And that's precisely what was done. One cluster leader told us how he dealt with great vision. He made it clear that while every proposed idea was valuable, unless someone was willing to "take the ball and run with it," he would table the proposal until the next meeting. He further explained that sometimes the suggestions would "die a natural death." At other times, group members would bring new faces to the table who were willing to "put some muscle into it." What's important to remember is that if a really great idea is generated and there is sufficient interest in moving the proposal forward, the "right" people will be brought to the table.

Engage the Responsible Critic

The inclusivity advocated through the Progress Initiative produced an unexpected multiplier effect. The synergistic results of "just getting together with people and talking about a common cause" produced benefits for everyone involved. Entrepreneurs gained access to advice and expertise that was not previously available. Local business owners learned more about niche opportunities that would allow them to expand and grow their businesses. And citizens had a venue and an audience to promote and celebrate the unique aspects of their communities. One of the tourism cluster members explained the reciprocal benefits of citizen engagement, "it gives us [tourism cluster members] ammunition to move forward with our marketing strategies and it gives them [citizens] ammunition to move forward with ideas, resources, and funding to move projects forward."

Of course, it is not always easy to be inclusive. Sometimes, in spite of massive effort, stimulating involvement can be a difficult task. Some may be apathetic, indifferent, or disinterested. Others may be unaware or misinformed. And still others may be conflicted, concerned, or outright opposed to a particular course of action. Our data suggest that at least three things should be remembered when reaching out to those who have been unresponsive or critical. First, be patient. As one of our informants explained, sometimes people just need time. "Just be patient and persistent…those who are unwilling or not ready to accept…may not be against you or trying to be a visible impediment. They may just need time to make their decisions to be very careful in their deliberations."

Second, "meet people where they are." If the hope is to involve people from the mill, then go to the mill. If more youth involvement is needed, then be visible at the area high school. If there is a true commitment to engaging the "blue-nose old-money types" who "see themselves as part of a certain echelon," then recognize that they may need to be "treated specially at first, until you get them in a room and get their ear and listen to what they have to say." Inviting this constituent group to a community picnic is not likely to garner the same response as might an invitation to a small dinner party from a peer.

And finally, focus on common interests. People often did this by engaging in point-counterpoint-type discussions with those who professed a desire to produce some future outcome but were more intent on "crying in their beer" than doing something that might facilitate the expected results. Recall the story of the man at the bar with all the great ideas about what the community "should" be doing. Only after someone helped him to understand that his ideas were consistent with work already underway did this person become involved.

Being inclusive and getting the "right" people at the table, however, does not mean inviting only those who are supportive to the table. True outreach engages responsible critics by listening to their concerns, focusing on common interests, and encouraging involvement. Katherine Tyler Scott, a principal of Ki Thoughtbridge, the consulting firm providing advanced leadership training, offered this advice:

> So for the naysayers I would just say education is important. Focus on the common interest that they do share and helping them to see that power is not finite that power is infinite. When shared it can really be a substantial force for change. I don't think I have talked to anyone who said they didn't want a business friendly culture in the heart of Wisconsin so everyone agrees about that. I think everyone agrees about the entrepreneurial aspect of a cultural change as well. To engage the responsible critics I would focus on what the community has in common. Do not marginalize their concerns either. You need them just as much as you need the advocates.

Be Patient and Stay the Course

As noted previously, the kind of change proposed through the Community Progress Initiative takes time. As one person said, "You built up a culture over a long period of time, you're not going to change it overnight." Our data suggest at least three things that can be done to maintain momentum. First, celebrate success. "Celebrate every success… no matter how small the successes…celebrate a little bit or a lot and people will want to stay involved."

Second, continually develop local leadership. Recommendations here are consistent with the underlying assumptions that guide succession planning in business. Succession planning is an essential human resource function that ensures highly qualified people are throughout the organization today and into the future. When succession planning is done well, talented people are identified, mentored, and trained to develop for higher level and broader responsibilities. Investing in community leadership training is likely to produce similar outcomes. Kelly Lucas asserts that one of the most valuable components of the Progress Initiative is the Advanced

Leadership Institute, “I believe this is one of the most powerful programs in the Community Progress Initiative as it teaches people to relate to each other in new and different ways – it fosters respect, civility, equity, and inclusion.”

And finally, sometimes it is important to ask for help, particularly when the momentum seems to be slowing. This help can come in many forms. It can come from a guest speaker with experience directly relevant to a current issue or concern. It can take the form of a study tour to learn more about how others are responding to similar challenges. It can come from a hired consultant who can facilitate difficult conversations. Or it can come from someone who either possesses or has access to essential resources. The important thing is to ask for the help when needed.

One additional comment related to leadership; don’t lead from above and don’t assume you have all the answers. Leadership doesn’t have to mean being in charge of the meeting or setting the agenda, but rather leadership is about providing tools where necessary. This kind of leadership facilitates engagement and brings additional people around the table particularly because the ones at the table are apt to think either they need to make it happen or find the people who can. This kind of leadership also promotes broad ownership; no one is telling anyone else how to do it when what’s being done is crafted by those who are ultimately affected. And finally, surprising things those that are not expected can happen. Give them the tools, and trust that the people will make the right decisions for the community.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Community foundations are a rapidly growing and influential part of today's nonprofit sector. As public institutions with a long-term commitment to specific geographic areas, community foundations are uniquely positioned to engage members of the community in philanthropy, develop a thorough understanding of community needs and nonprofit capacity, and lead strategic community-based efforts. The research presented in this report provides a detailed account of how the Community Foundation of South Wood County in a collaborative partnership with the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance capitalized on local assets to make an appreciable difference in the community. Our findings suggest at least three important directions for research.

One future research possibility is to continue developing case studies of community foundations engaged in this work. Although through this project we have produced a number of important findings that have practical implications for community foundations across the country, at least three major forces that coalesced as the Progress Initiative began to take shape making the situation in south Wood County somewhat unique. Additionally, the case and factors involved were fairly straightforward and easy to isolate because of the remote location of this region from larger cities and a myriad of other external influences.

Another research area is to examine evaluation practices of community foundations engaged in economic development and community change initiatives. Given current trends in the field related to progressive approaches to economic development and a corresponding lack of established metrics for evaluating success (Anderson, et. al., 2006), it may be prudent to learn more about how community foundations align resources and evaluate their initiatives in relation to regional success.

A third research opportunity would be to examine the board's role in these types of community change initiatives. If the board of directors truly functions as an independent governing body which is "broadly representative of the community it serves" and is ultimately responsible for mission, strategic direction, and policies of the community foundation (Council on Foundations, 2002) then it seems appropriate to learn more about board involvement. What role does the board play as community change processes unfold? Do governance expectations and board activity change over time? What is the board's role in coordinating and facilitating strategic alliances? How do boards deal with conflict and dissent?

In spite of the work done for this project and a number of recent published reports about community foundation practice, the study of how these important organizations convene resources, solve problems, and advocate change is still relatively young. There is still much to be learned about how community foundations discharge their leadership responsibilities particularly in ways that promote community change and social justice.

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