

THE GRAND RURAL OREGON EXPERIMENT IN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Between 2003 and 2016 the Ford Institute Leadership Program graduated more than 6,300 community members from its leadership classes held in rural communities across Oregon. The classes, which consist of 48 class hours on traditional leadership subjects, augmented by a community project, engaged a broad and diverse group of citizens from youth to elders. The purpose of the training was to develop leaders who would strengthen community organizations and collaborations that would in turn change metrics of community vitality. Formal evaluation shows that the classes have strengthened community leaders, organizations and collaborations, and there is growing informal evidence that community projects led by graduates are impacting vitality. Much more formal evaluation is proposed for this grand experiment.

Introduction

The Ford Institute for Community Building is an initiative of The Ford Family Foundation of Roseburg, Oregon. The Foundation formed in 1996 from the estate of Kenneth W. Ford, owner of Roseburg Forest Products. The mission of the foundation, which serves rural communities (under 30,000 population) in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California (hereafter only Oregon is noted) is “successful citizens, vital rural communities.” The Foundation initially created large scholarship and grant programs, but in 2000, it launched a new initiative, called the Ford Institute for Community Building, to achieve vital rural communities through leadership development (successful citizens). The Institute created the Ford Institute Leadership Program as the vehicle for class delivery.

The idea of using leadership to achieve the mission originated with Mr. Ford, a lumberman who understood from his personal experience that those communities where his company had large mills tended to operate as company towns where the mill managers served as the town leaders. He intuited that there was much broader capacity within the community that could be developed. Mr. Ford worked with Dr. Charlie Walker, a Foundation board member and then President of Linfield College in Oregon, to move from his “founder’s intent” to a concept: an Institute that would develop successful citizens through structured leadership training.

In development of the Institute concept, in 1999 the Foundation hosted a conference that brought together from around Oregon experts on rural development and leadership. The keynote speaker, Charles Bray, past president of the Johnson Foundation, offered a list of guidelines including: development of community leadership is essential, building community assets trumps assessing community needs, and “sticking with it is essential; three-year investments are delusional” (Gallagher, 2012).

With these guidelines in hand, senior staff and Foundation board members took a fact-finding trip visiting, among others, the Blandin Foundation in Minnesota with its statewide community leadership program. The travelers were impressed with the “Blandin model” – which involved bringing several mid-career, known leaders from several communities together for a week of intensive training at a conference center. This model became the working concept for the Institute program.

In May 2001 the Institute hosted a second larger conference with nationally-recognized authorities on rural leadership, including senior officers of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. With notes from the fact-finding trip and the two conferences, the board met in a retreat to set strategic directives for the Institute. Key directors were: invest over time and get to know communities well, commit deeply to communities and believe in their capacity for growth, support local efforts to sustain leadership after interventions and training, and know how to assess the viability of a community.

In early 2002 the founding director of the Institute looked to one of the authors (Gallagher), who then worked with the Oregon State University Extension Service, for guidance. He was familiar with Extension’s Family and Community Leadership program (Schauber, 2001) and 4-H youth leadership programs (Seevers and Dormany, 1995). He offered a quite different model than that used by Blandin, a model more like the Family and Community Leadership Program. His model involved engaging a diverse group of community members in a leadership class, to be held in the community, and spread out over several months. The class was to include youth (teenagers) to elders, a mix of known, emerging, and potential leaders, and ethnic diversity appropriate to the community. It also was to involve sharing meals together and ideally a class/community project to work together.

With this new approach developing, in late 2002 the Institute contracted with the Heartland Center for Leadership Development in Lincoln, Nebraska, to prepare a curriculum. The Heartland Center engaged The Brushy Fork Institute at Berea College in Kentucky and Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) in Oregon as advisors. The Heartland Center is known as a national leader in rural community development; the Brushy Fork Institute is known for its community outreach in its service to Berea College; and RDI at that time was known primarily as an economic development nonprofit that worked in conjunction with various departments of the State of Oregon in rural communities. RDI, however, had also developed a rural leadership class called Rural Futures Forum, which it offered in communities where it was facilitating economic development projects. As the Institute and RDI became acquainted, it became apparent that the new Institute leadership class could supplant the Forum and be delivered by RDI

trainers. The scale of the endeavor was to be much larger than the Forum, but the grand scale it ultimately became was not apparent at the time.

Rather than build up the staff to offer the leadership classes in house, in January 2003, with Gallagher as the new Institute director, the Institute contracted with RDI to serve as the delivery partner for the new program. From that date forward, the Institute and RDI operated as a team and within weeks of the contract, RDI, using a draft curriculum from Heartland Center, offered the first “Leadership Development” class to the communities of the Coquille Valley located west of Roseburg. RDI had worked in the valley in previous years and quickly engaged 18 participants from ages 17 to 70, with experience ranging from elected leaders to interested community members and a high school student.

The curriculum consisted of 16 modules of three hours each, designed for an audience at about the community college level. Core elements included: the practice of leadership, community vitality, community development, communication, working in groups, managing conflict, running effective meetings, class (and community) project selection, impact and stakeholder analysis, resource development, project management, action planning, making presentations, marketing your project, and growing volunteers. The curriculum was seeded with exercises, such as appreciative inquiry and asset mapping and an early module included the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, implications of which were discussed in each of the subsequent modules. The Heartland Center embedded a class/community project in the curriculum so participants would be selecting and designing an actual project while learning new leadership knowledge and skills. The Institute agreed strongly with the project idea and made offered up to a \$5,000 match.

With the initial class being well received, the team soon engaged additional communities, with the plan being to engage four communities each fall and four more each spring. To provide the training to all 700-plus rural communities the team divided them into clusters, called “hubs,” using watershed boundaries, county lines, school districts, and advice from the communities as guides. Ultimately there were 88 hubs with an average population of about 8,000. The team met each semester to select hubs to receive the class the following year. Rather than advertising the program, the team relied on word-of-mouth advertising, much occurring through the League of Oregon Cities, Association of Oregon Counties and RDI’s network of contacts. Interested communities contacted the Institute or RDI to be entered into the queue.

To identify class participants, RDI in each community developed a committee of known leaders who first brainstormed a list of organizations, both formal and informal, in the community, and then identified representatives of those organizations, often creating a list of over 100 individuals. Committee members visited with top nominees, providing information about the class, such as time commitment. The nominees, if interested, would apply. In this way all class participants were recommended by community members and all were volunteers. The team originally set class size at 18 but that number grew to 25 as trainer skill increased; larger classes were tested but found less effective by trainers at developing the desired conversation. All costs were born by the Institute and participants only had to commit their time and energy.

As there were often many more applicants than spaces in the class, the Institute in 2004 asked the Foundation board to fund up to three leadership classes in each community, giving each hub about 75 total graduates. This decision dramatically increased the Institute budget and RDI contract three-fold and challenged RDI's capacity to deliver multiple classes simultaneously. As classes were held at a convenient meeting place in a hub community, trainers had to drive to the community. RDI responded by hiring and locating trainers on a regional basis. The team tested several class presentation schedules but the favorite for community members turned out to be offering modules Friday afternoon and evening and Saturday morning and early afternoon, about one weekend a month for four months. The actual weekends were scheduled so they did not conflict with events on the community calendar. The program included catered meals each day, often served by a local restaurant or caterer, to provide time for out-of-class discussion.

For communities with many Spanish-speaking residents, RDI developed a 12-hour "prequel" class in Spanish to prepare participants for the main class. RDI also developed a similar prequel for Native American communities, which was taught by a Native American trainer. Both classes emphasized that the leader/follower relationship is defined by the culture.

Most of the class participants were engaged in one or more organizations—nonprofits, membership groups, community organizations, and local government—in their community and soon they requested additional training to apply the new leadership knowledge and skills to their specific organizations and collaborations. In 2004 the board approved, and the Institute began to offer classes called "Effective Organizations" and "Community Collaborations" in each hub, thus adding to the budget, contract, class load, and the commitment to communities. (Two additional contractors, Human Systems and the Nonprofit Association of Oregon, helped RDI deliver these classes, each serving about one third of the state.) Each class included 16 hours of class time with follow up one-on-one consultation with a professional and more detailed support available through a technical assistance grant from the Foundation. To provide additional support for graduates of any of the three classes, and for those who were not able to attend the classes, the Institute developed a set of resources - a free book program, a semiannual periodical (Community Vitality), a website with various resources, and conferences.

After much consideration the team organized the delivery of the five classes into a five-year sequence: leadership development cohort 1, effective organizations, leadership development cohort 2, community collaborations, and leadership development cohort 3. This arrangement allowed each class to promote the next; for example, the asset mapping exercise in the first leadership class identified the organizations to invite to the following effective organizations class, and the effective organizations class brought in new contacts who seeded the second leadership class. The collaborations class filled with all previous class participants and their invitees who seeded the third leadership class.

To structure delivering five classes to each of the 88 hubs, the team brought four hubs into the five-class sequence each fall, and four more each spring. Once the pipeline was full, in 2007, there were 20 classes with about 500 participants offered each fall and each spring. Through this period the team's "big, hairy and audacious goal" was to provide all communities with classes in ten years, by 2013; we expected to have 5,000 graduates.

The five-year commitment to each hub meant that the team got to know communities very well, and it soon became apparent that there were high capacity, motivated graduates of the leadership classes who were willing to volunteer their time to help with the next classes. Indeed, some class participants were current or former teachers and many had significant leadership experience. RDI developed a program to prepare “community ambassadors” who would help organize and present subsequent leadership classes. About ten percent of leadership class graduates, including youth, volunteered to become community trainers, creating a large pool, presently over 660 individuals, of talent for their hub, the Institute, and RDI. In 2012 the Institute moved forward with a “Ford Community Fellows” program, where the Institute selected Fellows from among the best of the community ambassadors, provided advanced training and a small stipend, and asked the Fellows to “go forth and practice the art and science of community building.” This cadre of fellows, along with the hundreds of community ambassadors, serve as key liaisons between the Foundation and its communities, and as key liaisons to other foundations, organizations, institutions and agencies that wish to work in the community.

RDI and the Institute did not quite meet their goal of engaging all communities by 2013, in part as some proposed hubs subdivided, but by the spring of 2016 the team had offered at least one leadership class in all hubs, and the vast majority had participated in all five classes. There were 6,300 graduates of the leadership class and 3,000 more graduates of the organizations and collaborations classes. In 2012 the Foundation president and Institute director retired and new leadership began a process of closing the Ford Institute Leadership Program in favor of efforts to work directly with the graduates to promote projects and programs that would move communities toward vitality. These new efforts are still very young and have not been formally evaluated.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

There are numerous examples of leadership programs, including rural programs, in the nation (Kaufman & Russ, 2006; Russon & Reinelt, 2004; Flora et al. 2004) and the use of a structured curriculum presented in a class format is the norm (Knowlton, 2002). The Institute’s leadership program was given much of its theoretical substance by the Heartland Center and its consultants the Brushy Fork Institute and Rural Development Initiatives. While the Center selected and refined the module content the Brushy Fork Institute introduced the theory of how leadership promotes community vitality -- establishing the working hypothesis for the program – called the Tupelo Model (Grisham, 1999; Brushy Fork Institute, 2016). The model posits a causal hierarchy beginning with (a) human development, followed by (b) leadership development, (c) organization development, (d) community development, and (e) economic development. The Institute, in deference to the mission statement of the Foundation, modified the highest level from “economic development” to “vital rural communities.” The Institute also defined the word “community” as being primarily about collaboration, or social capital. While the Tupelo Model is shown as a hierarchical sequence the model proponents recognize that in practice development may occur at several levels at that same time, that there can be a reverse linkage between levels, and that there are many more variables than leadership that influence vitality (Grisham, 1999). However, the Tupelo Model was found to be simple and effective in discussions with community

members, and the Foundation board, as it made the point that the Institute program was about the leadership element of vitality, not the entire complex of variables that influence rural community vitality (Etuk et al, 2013).

An underlying principle of this model is that “local people must address local problems” (Brushy Fork Institute, 2016). One of the challenges of government and philanthropy is to not take a “top down” approach where expert professionals both define the problem for communities and then define a solution, often presented as a “best practice.” This challenge of being in service to communities had been encouraged in the early conferences and in the book “Challenging the Professions” (Chambers, 1993) offered to the Institute by staff of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The wisdom of the book was: If professionals and academics in the Institute, including board and staff, do not trust the local community for problem definition and problem solution then the local knowledge and the local commitment critical to success would be lost. Each community needs to define and achieve its own vision of vitality.

The curriculum also expressed the hands-on experience of the Heartland Center and RDI. They were aware that the appreciative inquiry exercise (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987; Priest et al. 2013) and the asset mapping exercise (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) helped people to shift from a glass half empty to a glass half full perspective. They also recognized that hands-on experience (Kolb, 1984; Richardson, 1994) in the class project would be important as graduates moved beyond the class project to “what’s next” in their community. The Heartland Center also designed the curriculum so that it emphasized guided and candid discussion with limited mini-lectures on selected topics (Galpin, 2009).

The Heartland Center incorporated much research on social capital into the curriculum, including team work, making meetings work, working across differences, and other aspects of social capital (Flora & Flora, 1990; Pigg, 2002). The RDI and Institute team furthered the growth of social capital through their program design, such as having meals between modules. The curriculum also drew on the related work of Castle (1998) called “total rural capital” with its attention to the importance of place and place-based resources and values. Oregon is one of the most geographically diverse states in the nation and it was critical that the leadership program work with people in their specific place and with their specific history. RDI trainers were prepared to engage class participants in the “genius of their place.”

As the Institute moved toward a program for delivery, it checked itself against the principles set down in the W.K. Kellogg Foundation report, “Better Than Bake Sales: A Leadership Programming Study” (Knowlton 2002). The report surveys several dozen community leadership programs and identifies seven common program limitations: lack of shared vision, siloed participation (too few participants from a single organization or community), fragile revenue streams, limited expertise (of trainers), home-grown (not built on proven principles), limited dose (time in training), and limited evidence of community impact. These principles helped the Institute anticipate weaknesses to address as the program developed rapidly from 2003 through 2007. It was of particular benefit to the Institute to have the financial resources, as well as a partner in Rural Development Initiatives, to avoid these limitations.

Evaluation

The Tupelo Model provided the basic logic for the evaluation. The challenge, at first, was to help the Foundation board members understand that causality is very difficult to prove, and that the expression of the Tupelo Model – from an investment in leadership to changes in a community vitality metric – takes time. The board members, most of whom were in private business, wanted immediate results but initially the team could provide little more than input and output data about the classes and participants. What did matter to board members, however, were informed opinions and stories that developed in communities and came to them via staff reports, but also informal channels outside the Institute. From these opinions and stories it was clear that the Institute program was viewed in communities as very timely and important; a queue of communities wanting to be in the program began to form.

For early evaluation of classes the team used simple Likert-scaled and open-ended questions about the program, the curriculum, the trainers, and the facilities and food. These early responses helped to improve the entire program, from selection of participants, to changes in the curriculum and improvements in the class project criteria. As the project was where the “rubber met the road” that was where issues most often arose, ranging from the individual that was upset his or her project was not selected by the class, to excessively large projects that were beyond the ability of the class to complete, to projects that required local government approval that might take months or years. With time, the criteria limited projects to improvements in places such as parks and playgrounds, community entry signs, and bike racks around town.

As the number of class graduates increased into the hundreds and then thousands, the Institute contracted with faculty of the Oregon State University, Department of Family and Community Development to conduct formal evaluation beginning in 2007. At that time the Institute and evaluation team accepted the terminology used in the Logic Model Development Guide developed by the Kellogg Foundation (2000) of inputs/resources, outputs, outcomes (immediate, intermediate and late), and impacts. This decision, while academically defensible, created a vocabulary that was very difficult for staff and most board members to understand, and was very seldom if ever used with community members.

Rather than a large summative evaluation, the faculty proposed a series of annual studies that would move through the outputs, outcomes (immediate, intermediate, and late), and impacts as they developed; the mantra of the evaluation faculty was “evaluate no part of the program before it’s time.” The faculty provided annual reports from 2007 through 2012, each targeting several specific questions with formal methods. This paper concerns outcome evaluations from 2007 through 2011 (Etuk et al, 2009; Sektnan et al, 2010; Sektnan et al, 2011; Etuk & Sektnan, 2012).

On a parallel track, to ultimately understand how the Institute investments might influence community vitality, the Institute contracted with OSU Rural Studies to develop a recommended set of indicators of vitality (Etuk, 2012). The effort started out with a review of hundreds of indicators used throughout the nation, and world, for community planning but ultimately settled on 29 indicators. To measure the changes in the indicators the Institute also contracted with

Rural Studies to establish a database, the Rural Communities Explorer, which assembled available data from many sources, to monitor changes (www.oregonexplorer.info).

Results: Inputs/Resources, Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

Inputs/Resources. The Institute did not suffer, as the W.K. Kellogg report warned, from lack of resources or inputs. By the time the leadership program was offering 20 classes a semester in 2008, the foundation's corpus had grown to over \$500 million, which meant, under Internal Revenue Service rules that it needed to expend 5% of the corpus, or \$25 million, each year. The Foundation invested nearly half of those funds in its major college scholarship programs, which supporting over 1,000 students a year, while much of the remainder went into capital projects funded on a grant basis. The Institute's first budget in 2002 was about \$200,000, which then grew incrementally until in 2007 it was over \$2 million, but still only about 8% of the Foundation expenditure that year. Most of this funding was for RDI to deliver classes. It is important to note that this figure represented 40 classes each year, including all travel, pre-class coordination, facilities and catering, post-class project follow-up, curriculum review and development, as well as all office support services. The budget also grew with a host of additions, such as classes in Spanish language and classes for Native Americans, preparation of community ambassadors, and the program for Ford Fellows. A much fuller discussion of the Institute budget can be found in Gallagher (2012).

Outputs. The 2008 evaluation (Etuk et al, 2009) looked at outputs – the classes and the participants. At that time there were 1,279 graduates of the leadership class from 56 hubs with an average class size of about 20. The age range was from 13 to 84 (now 93) with 18% youth (teenage years) and 16% retired. Women outnumbered men about two to one and were the majority in all but one hub. Anglos made up 84% of the participants except in some communities with large Spanish or Native American populations. (Note: If a minority group was missed in the first leadership class cohort, a special effort was made, including offering the “prequel” classes, to engage them in one of the subsequent classes.) In terms of education level of participants, 29% were college graduates compared with 15% in rural Oregon, while 1% had not completed high school compared to 30% in rural Oregon. Class participants were much more likely to be, in the MBTI assessment, NF (45%), nearly three times the reference population (16%) in the MBTI literature (Myers et al, 1994). This group gave the classes a very future and people oriented character. Over 30% of county commissioners participated in the leadership class as did many city councilors, mayors, organization heads, sheriffs and others in law enforcement, school leaders, and church leaders. Each class had about eight “known suspects” but just as many who were either new to the community or were viewed as potential leaders. Participants gave the classes and instructors uniformly high marks (4.3 on 5.0 scale) with the MBTI module receiving the highest scores. With comments from participants and the experience of trainers, the curriculum was updated at the close of most years, and by 2012 was on version 6.0.

Outcomes – Immediate. For the program immediate outcomes were defined as changes within the individual participant, interpreted by the Institute as becoming a more successful citizen. The 2009 evaluation (Sektan et al, 2010) found, with class participants self-reporting in a post-then-pre survey, that they had significantly increased leadership knowledge (competency) and

increased leadership skill (behaviors) in the many topics in the curriculum, and they had increased motivation to engage in leadership. Participants felt the class increased the number of community leaders (82%), helped them create a better future for their community (85%), helped them appreciate community assets (89%), expanded their network and resources (90%), and helped them work more effectively in teams (92%). Potential leaders, including most youth, gained the most from the class, becoming more like known leaders. Most reported the class “was a life changing experience” and many noted the value of being part of larger network -- social capital one participant called “positive acquaintance.” The outcomes were very similar to those identified in the multi-program assessment by Knowlton (2002), which was expected as the classes were based on solid experience.

Outcomes – Intermediate. The 2010 evaluation (Sektan et al, 2011) focused primarily on how graduates used their new knowledge and skill in the community. Of particular interest was how they were strengthening community organizations and collaborations. Graduates reported voting at a perfect 100% of eligible voters, and 87% reported they were applying their new capacity in community organizations, 86% in their family, and 81% in the workplace. This evaluation used a 12-month follow-up survey where participants reported more than doubling their volunteer time from 14 hours to 33 hours per month in service to an average of 2.4 organizations. Many reported they had taken on new roles in community organizations, such as serving on the board or heading up a project. Building on their positive acquaintance with other graduates they often talked about new collaborations among organizations. And, the evaluation also showed that the effects of the leadership training did not decline with time; there was no significant loss of skills or motivation over seven years.

Outcomes – Late. This 2010 study began to examine changes made in the community by the graduates or their organizations, or late outcomes. The increased capacity in the community began to appear within the Foundation itself in many ways, for example, a significant portion of the youth in the leadership class went on to receive college scholarships from the Foundation; the Foundation began to receive stronger grant applications for well-supported and prepared capital projects; and the Foundation found that when it worked in a community on a special issue, such as a new initiative in early childhood development, it had a ready group of community leaders to help it. Other foundations that serve rural communities began to report that they were receiving stronger grant applications and government agencies and non-profits often sought out leadership class graduates to provide them guidance on working in the community. Also, stories began to accumulate that sometimes a community did not ask foundations or agencies for support, but simply identified a problem in the community and solved it with local resources – the ideal outcome of the Tupelo Model.

As part of the next year’s study, in 2011 (Etuk & Sektan, 2012), the evaluators surveyed 1,844 leadership class graduates and asked how the actions of the graduates mattered in the community. More than 900 of 1,226 comments in an open-ended question about the benefits of the program were about community capacity and how the community now had a critical mass of leaders; there was an infusion of new blood in leadership circles, and a growing number of

volunteers both in general and for leadership positions (More information about these evaluations is summarized in Gallagher. 2012).

Impacts

With the change in Foundation and Institute leadership the formal evaluation program was terminated in 2013 before it could explore late outcomes and impacts in depth. It is unclear to the authors at this time if evaluation of the Institute program will be continued. There are, however, many score of stories that strongly suggest that the Foundation's considerable investments in leadership training have impacted community vitality. Some of the stories are about individuals, such as class graduates who have gone on to be elected to leadership positions in local and state government where they have supported legislation important to rural communities. There are also stories about how the many graduates in the League of Oregon Cities and Association of Oregon Counties now collaborate to help these interest groups improve communities. Other stories are about physical improvements in the community; there are not fewer than 50 major capital improvements, such as community centers and libraries, which have been led by class graduates. And there are quite literally hundreds of small projects and programs such as improvements to parks, food banks, street landscaping, and even bioswales associated with the class projects and post-class projects by graduates. There are numerous stronger community organizations as well as new organizations, such as a community foundation, and collaborations among organizations to support a particular program or issue. Of the many stories that need to be evaluated in depth, we offer three as examples that are rich with the expression of the community's social capital.

Vernonia: In December 2007 this community of 2,400 residents west of Portland suffered a 500-year flood that seriously damaged their three school buildings, health clinic, utility office, food bank, and scores of homes and businesses. The three schools were rendered uninsurable and the 600-plus students had to either meet in mobile classrooms or be bussed 30 miles over mountain passes to the next community. There was talk of abandoning the school district, but the 56 graduates of Institute's two leadership classes held in previous years helped with the cleanup and immediate repairs then put their new knowledge and skills into action to lead the design, funding, and construction of a new K-12, LEED certified school and community library. That facility, which many dismissed as an impossible pipedream, opened for classes in the fall of 2012. (A more complete story is available at: http://www.rdiinc.org/news/vernonia_secret_garden. Google map: Vernonia High School, 1000 Missouri Avenue, Vernonia, OR.)

Dorris: This town of 930 people in the far northeast corner of Siskiyou County, Calif. had just 24 graduates of leadership classes held in a hub that included nearby residents of Oregon. In 2008 the graduates, who represented many of the organizations of this remote and self-reliant community, began work to develop a new community center. After much planning and fundraising (following the processes defined in the curriculum) they designed, funded, and constructed their new log-cabin style community center, which opened in 2011. The building now serves over 20 community organizations, provides classroom space for the regional

community college, and is the interpretive center and offers parking for the nearby Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge (Google map: Dorris, CA -- Dorris Lion's Club).

Another project that resulted directly from the leadership classes is the Hood River Waterfront Park in Hood River, Oregon, which opened in 2008. The concept was developed when three members of the first leadership class—one each representing the city, county, and port authority—got into an animated discussion in class about how to replace a swimming hole in the Hood River that had been filled in by an outwash of gravel from Mt. Hood. The swimming hole was an important community meeting place, particularly for Hispanic families who worked in nearby orchards and vineyards. Within months land trades had been made, and within two years a community park, designed with extensive community involvement, was constructed on the bank of the Columbia River near a favorite beach used by wind surfers. The native plant landscaping was installed entirely by volunteers. There were 24 graduates of the leadership program in that class, including the mayor, who brought that project to fruition. (Google map: Hood River, OR -- Hood River Waterfront Park).

For people in these three communities, there is no question that the projects they developed make their community more vital. It is without doubt that they also change indicators of vitality important to the community, such as having strong local school for Vernonia that keeps young families from moving away; having a meeting place for a score of community groups and community college classes in Dorris; and having a safe place to learn how to swim in Hood River, a community that had suffered several drownings in recent years and where there was a tradition of learning to swim in the river. These projects, and many more across the state, are awaiting evaluation.

While formal evaluation has apparently stopped, a summary comment is captured in a blog by Dan Kemmis, former Mayor of Missoula, Montana, and the author of three books on community development (Kemmis, 1990). About the Institute program he writes: “The evaluation set out to answer several questions, including these: Does the program develop effective community leaders? Does it contribute to increased civic engagement? Does the program build strong organizations? The ... answers were all yes. The program’s overarching approach works: Community leaders who attend the classes learn skills, maintain them and use them” (Kemmis, 2012).

Recommendations and Limitations

There are many points of discussion regarding both what is working and what could work better in the program. For now, these points are outside the formal evaluation. Positive aspects of the leadership program, which we offer as recommendations to future programs, include:

- Use hubs to bring several communities in the same geographic area together, often bridging historic tensions and building a larger network that can learn from each other and address more regional issues.
- Meet in the community so funders and trainers get to see the specific places, to become more “place based” in their engagement, and so those who may find travel difficult, such as youth and elders, can attend the classes.

- Provide food and time to share it. Encourage participants to talk about topics other than class subjects during meal breaks. Think rural “social capital” in facility selection and program operation – help people get to know each other.
- Stay engaged with communities after the five-year sequence of classes, ideally with more classes and other learning support, but just as importantly support for community-defined projects (Scheffert, 2007).
- Engage a broad spectrum of the community, from youth to elders; the youth bring energy and perspective while elders can offer history and perspective on their place (Jones, 2009; Manning et al, 2006).
- Engage a mix of known, emerging, and potential leaders, and work with the known leaders to be good mentors. In some cases this required helping known leaders adapt from an executive or military style of leadership to a community style where they are working with volunteers.
- Engage a critical mass from each community, not “siloes participation” where one or a few fellows are expected to precipitate community change. With most hubs having approximately 8,000 residents and 75 class graduates, the program typically engaged about 1% of the population, which was felt to be a critical mass.
- Promote class/community projects in each cohort. The projects were arguably the most difficult part of the class but also the most enjoyable. With three class projects in each community the projects were a visible reminder of the program and the new capacity of class participants.
- Offer a deep and complex dosage of training, including multiple leadership classes as well as supplementary training such as effective organizations and community collaboration classes. Support the graduates with publications, conferences, website, etc.
- Encourage and support on-going volunteerism. We would note that the 6,300 graduates of the Institute’s classes volunteer over 200,000 hours to their community organizations *each month*.
- Engage leadership class graduates to serve as community ambassadors, increasing their leadership knowledge and skill, creating valuable community representatives, and reducing the cost of the training. Consider bolstering support in the field using the best of the best as “fellows.” With the Institute leadership program now concluded, there is the possibility that community ambassadors will continue to offer classes.
- Partnerships build capacity. The partnership between the Institute and RDI brought together two entities with different cultures, capacities, and interests, creating synergy where both grew stronger in its own realm. While the Institute was RDI’s primary contractor, RDI, as a nonprofit, generated considerable support for rural Oregon by applying for grants and providing services. RDI enriched rural Oregon by winning a \$2 million W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant to develop rural entrepreneurship. (See Connecting Oregon for Rural Entrepreneurship http://fieldus.org/publications/EDS08/EDS_2008CORECS.pdf).

On the limitations side, we learned:

- It is important to engage some elected officials in every class to assure the class doesn't unknowingly develop a project that has fiscal implications for the elected governments and that the class has the opportunity to connect with local government.
- A few people will be annoyed by a leadership class, particularly those with their own agenda for the community, such as a cabal of historic leaders, a strong city manager with a personal agenda, or an organization or business that enjoys its dominance in a low-capacity community.
- It is important for the class to reach out to the broader community so that class graduates are not perceived as an elite or otherwise self-serving interest group.
- The bias in the MBTI toward the NF (intuitive feeler) type gave the class a very forward looking and caring style, but at the expense of the SP (sensing perceiving) type that was largely absent. Formal sit-down classes are not attractive to the SP type so a special effort was made in selection of the class project to provide an attractive opportunity for the SP type, who prefer learning by doing, to get involved.
- It is very hard to keep contact with so many communities after the class series ends. This is a problem as there is a tacit expectation in rural communities that relationships are for the long term and that some level of engagement will continue. The Foundation and Institute, and RDI, developed a very positive statewide "brand" but it is very hard to sustain that relationship with both leadership turnover and program changes.
- Boards and staff are subject to burnout on a long-term program and there is an ongoing challenge to keep them from closing an existing program so they can "try their own thing." This is our interpretation of what has happened to the Ford Institute Leadership Program following the change in board and foundation leadership after some 13 years. Of course, the new leadership is offering new programs, but it is not clear at this time if the new programs will gain traction in rural areas and be able to harness the "standing army" of leadership graduates.

Conclusion

We who worked with the Institute leadership program are very aware that we experienced the perfect convergence of founder's intent, supportive Foundation board and staff, deep revenue and resources, thoughtful and generous partners and collaborators, and community members who stepped up to make the classes and program a success. Whereas most foundations suffer from the "delusion" that in three years a program can stimulate desired change, we were fortunate to have over four times that long. The unique convergence of factors enjoyed in this program is unlikely to be repeated again soon, particularly at such a grand scale.

However, there are foundations that have the assets to take on a similar leadership program commitment for their state, region, or community. The Institute program has been replicated at a smaller scale by others, including the Sherwood Trust, which serves the southeast corner of the state of Washington. The Trust uses the Ford Institute Leadership Program curriculum and offers one class each year, either to a rural community or to an urban, often Spanish-speaking, neighborhood. The Trust has worked with RDI to develop its own trainers and to share in what is learned. (As RDI has been responsible for the curriculum evolution over the years they are the

official “keepers” now and it is appropriate to contact them for further information about its use. rdi@rdinc.org; http://rdiinc.org/leadership_development)

Another major conclusion is that only one entity needs to invest in leadership training in a place, and all will benefit. As mentioned earlier, the Institute’s leadership class graduates are well-known among other funders, organizations, and agencies that serve rural communities. The entity that provides leadership training improves the capacity of community overall, making it a good investment for those who care about their place, whether college/university, K-12 education, health care, public safety, faith-based group, public service group, philanthropy, or a collaboration of several or all. We feel strongly that philanthropies such as family foundations are well positioned to provide the training for the place they serve (Cugliari & Earnest, 2007) but are also aware that foundations tend to want to invest for just a few years. Given the longevity of universities, there is logic in having them serve as the focus for community leadership training. One of this paper’s authors (Gallagher, 2013) has developed this idea that higher education can use community leadership training as an element in developing community wellness (Perez & Ode, 2013).

Before a final closing comment, we wish to note that the Institute’s success is built on prior investments, particularly by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, that seemed to have converged on the Institute. The Institute’s first two directors were Kellogg National Leadership Fellows, one of the directors had taught the Kellogg-funded Phi Theta Kappa Leadership Development Studies at the college level, featured guests and advisors at the early conferences were senior Kellogg staff, the Institute’s advisor within the Foundation had been a program director with Kellogg, the Institute looked to the Kellogg-supported Family and Community Leadership Program as a model, both the Heartland Center and Rural Development Initiatives are Kellogg grantees, and the program and evaluation design are based on Kellogg publications. Some of these investments date back nearly 40 years, but the confluence around this program is undeniable and we are thankful. We would add, here, that these investments support the notion that leadership is not a quick fix but rather an investment that can take years to be expressed. That said, we expect a host of outcomes and impacts from the Ford Institute Leadership Program in years to come.

Special Closing Comment

We close with a most serious comment about how leadership development may help rural communities, particularly in the West, respond to increasingly divisive issues: We offer two examples. First, John Day is a very rural community of 1,700 residents deep in the forested mountains of central Oregon. The community has been in economic decline since the 1980s with the reduction in timber harvest on federal lands. By 2010 the Institute had held three classes in John Day, with 62 graduates, when the Aryan Nation came to town prospecting for a new national headquarters. Class graduates met with RDI facilitators and, with great civility, over 350 community residents met twice and helped the visitors understand John Day would not be a desirable headquarters.

Second, we thought the John Day situation was a one-time experience, but then early in 2016 a group from Nevada occupied the offices of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near the town

of Burns in south central Oregon. There were 79 graduates of the leadership classes in this hub (Harney County) including several staff with the refuge, and most importantly the senior county commissioner (title of “judge”). It was the judge, seen often on national news, who, along with the sheriff, was central to the peaceful resolution of the situation. We hear from leadership class graduates that they are now working hard to find ways to help the community, now divided by recalls and lawsuits, to get back to working together.

In exploring this issue we found that the subject is of growing interest. Cartwright et al. (2005) explored the role of Extension Service in responding to community crisis and Perreaut (2012) examined how leadership matters to “civil civic dialogue across ‘enemy lines’.” More recently, Rachel and Stephen Kaplan (2010) proposed a “reasonable person model” that posits that when people can develop accurate mental models (leadership knowledge and skill), take meaningful action and find they are effective, they are prone to be reasonable. One of the authors, (Gallagher, 2015) links community capacity building, such as offered by the Ford Institute, to the model (Kaplan, R. & Basu, A., 2015) and proposes that civility is part of what a community leader offers and strives to develop. Carvan (2015) has offered that “leadership for the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous now” is a challenge to the field of leadership education. We concur and suggest much more research into this aspect of leadership, and note that the two communities of John Day and Burns can serve as real case studies. (For more information about working in the communities contact Rural Development Initiatives.)

There is so much yet to learn from this rural Oregon experiment, including studies that can build on the existing evaluation reports as well as new studies that examine specific class elements, participants such as youth, places or regions, or outcomes or impacts. In all cases the thousands of class graduates provide a ready support group for community access.

The Ford Institute Leadership Program was a grand experiment in rural leadership development - in terms of the classes offered, people and towns engaged, years of offering, and dollars expended. For those who worked to deliver the program it was an unforgettable opportunity and experience and one that they recommend strongly to others, even if at a much smaller scale. Now that the leadership program has been closed, what matters most for those close to this program is that there are now thousands of community leaders in Oregon who are helping their community find and achieve their own vision of vitality.

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