A FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING AND IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY VISIONING

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With more research focusing on community visioning and its role in successful change processes, this community development tool is increasingly cited as an efficient and effective means of identifying core community values, prioritizing goals and strategies, and implementing community plans, policies, and decisions (Aigner et al., 1999; Ayres, 1996; Bloom, 2000; Bodeen & Hilliker, 1999; Christensen & Robinson, 1989; Flora & Flora, 2008; Green et al., 2001; Green & Haines, 2008; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1997; Peterson, 1995; Potapchuk, 1996; Shipley, 2002; Walzer et al., 1995; Walzer, 1996). Advances in both theory and applied visioning case study work continue to guide practitioners, academics, and community residents interested in conducting research, learning from cases, and applying the concept to effect community change.

The growing body of community visioning scholarship has also benefited from the body of research applied and described in a variety of settings. For example, visioning has been used as a way to confront urban decay (Murtagh, 2001), to address economic change (Brown-Graham & Austin, 2004; Weinberg, 1999), as a way of identifying leaders (Sandmann & Kroshus, 1991), and as a method of managing tensions associated with multiculturalism (Uyesugi & Shipley, 2005). It also has been used to create a more participatory democratic process in community planning and development (McKinlay, 2006; Plein et al., 1998), in corporate decision-making (Helling, 1998), in a range of international settings (Cuthill, 2004; Murtagh, 2001), and more generally, as a way to build trust and enhance relationships in communities (Flora & Flora, 2008). Much of this scholarly work describes the process and outcome of community visioning from a case study perspective. However, there is a paucity of research on effective strategies and related methods of teaching community visioning to practitioners (those leading the process) and community residents (those engaged in the process) involved in visioning efforts. This gap in scholarship includes a theoretical framework on community visioning pedagogy.

Ultimately, the question arises as to why residents and practitioners should be invested in learning about community visioning and why community developers should be concerned with a framework on community visioning pedagogy? Why not just let the “experts” come in and “do” visioning for the community? The response to this question comes in two parts. First, citizen participation in the affairs of their future is the raison d'être of democracy. Providing the tools to act (i.e., community visioning pedagogy) is critical to promoting more inclusive, deliberate and decisive democratic processes and outcomes. Indeed, the simple allowance of participation is not sufficient, but rather as Williams and Matheny (1995, p. 62) argue, “conditions for meaningful citizenship must first be created.”

Stated more succinctly, democracy in the form of face-to-face, informed, and authentic participation is essential since “citizenship is not a spectator sport” (Putnam, 2000, p. 341). By inculcating residents and practitioners in fundamental aspects of community visioning, community development professionals become intimately engaged in promoting democracy through meaningful citizen participation in process and outcome.

Secondly, providing community residents and practitioners with the tools and skills necessary to understand, undertake, accomplish, evaluate, and manage community visioning legitimates both their role and the final outcome of the process. According to Fischer (2000, p. 259) not only does citizen participation give meaning to the term democracy, but “it plays an important role in legitimating both policy formulation and implementation.” Citizens acting only in a consultative role but without the tools and authority to act (i.e., knowing about the fundamental processes and outcomes of community visioning) is merely a gesture of what Arnstein (1969, p. 217) refers to as “tokenism.” Thus, teaching fundamental aspects of community visioning to both residents and practitioners is essential to increasing effective participation, legitimizing the outcome, and ensuring crucial follow-through of oversight, evaluation and long-term management and a community vision and the resulting actions.

This chapter derives key principles of visioning and develops a theoretical framework to better understand fundamental components of community visioning pedagogy. More specifically, the chapter presents five key principles of visioning that can be used to prepare practitioners and residents in the coordination, participation, and implementation of a visioning process. Using a case study approach and data from five focus groups with representatives from 35 communities across Montana and 14 interviews we describe the development of the principles and their application in preparing community members for a visioning process.

The principles are: (1) instill a sense of “ownership” in the visioning process and outcome; (2) understand the importance of “personality of place”; (3) emphasize leadership development; (4) use a well-trained coach and steering committee; and (5) provide an effective support structure. A theoretical framework based on these principles is presented as a pedagogical orientation for community visioning. Challenges and accomplishments are described and discussed in terms of outcomes in these communities as well as how this framework can be applied in other settings.
The final section concludes with recommendations on future program design and delivery.

Case Study Background: Visioning in Rural Montana Communities

Many areas of rural Montana are experiencing trends and changes that necessitate planning and visioning exercises. Poverty rates are well above national averages (Harrison & Watusi, 2004; Proctor & Dalaker, 2003). These rural agricultural and ranching areas tend to generally exhibit higher unemployment, lower levels of education, limited access to healthcare options (Smith, 2008), and economic and social pressures from out-migration and an aging population (Johnson, 2004; Von Reichert, 2002).

The need to understand and address economic, social, political and environmental changes in these communities is great. In these scenarios, visioning becomes a capacity-building process that identifies and explores the potential of the community to engage in positive change through dialogue and a commitment to action. The community visioning process in each place focused specifically on addressing poverty, with a deliberate emphasis on incorporating diverse populations including low income, youth, elderly and single parents in the visioning efforts.

The 35 communities in this case study were all involved in a coordinated program called Horizons with the stated goal of addressing poverty and economic change in the region. Initiated by Montana State University (MSU) Extension, the program incorporated several phases including formal community dialogue sessions and leadership development training followed by a community visioning and action component. The program was coordinated by Extension Faculty based at MSU Extension (hereafter, the MSU Extension Leadership Team). Funding for the program was provided by the private, nonprofit Northwest Area Foundation whose mission is to reduce poverty in northwest United States.

The goal of the Horizons program is to help communities understand poverty and build community capacity to bring about long-term change. Community visioning was seen as an integral part of the overall goal. The communities include several tribal organizations ranging in population from 139 to 4,089 with poverty rates from 10.2 percent to 40.9 percent based on the U.S. Census Bureau criteria (Table 5.1). While addressing poverty was the focus of the entire program, community members were free to dialogue about and address any community issue in the visioning phase.

The program began in 2004 with four communities; an additional 16 communities were added to the program in 2006 and 15 more added in 2008. A coach was identified by the Leadership Team in each community. The coach was either the existing MSU county extension agent or was a community member able to make a commitment to serve as the community liaison with the Leadership Team and as the community organizer. The coach was assigned the duty of assembling a steering committee representing a diverse and representative group of community members (i.e., youth, elderly, various income brackets, special interests, and others).

The steering committee coordinated all of the community work including meeting logistics, recruiting members to participate in the various phases of the program, and overseeing the visioning, action planning, and implementation.

Regional workshops were organized and offered by the Leadership Team at convenient locations to introduce the program and provide information about various phases including the visioning process. The workshops were open to the community coaches, steering committee members, and residents in each case. The workshop objectives were to: introduce the concept and role of the coach who would assist with the visioning process; explain fundamental principles of the community dialogue sessions; leadership development and visioning and action; establish basic expectations of successful implementation of the program; and provide ideas to promote community inclusiveness during the visioning process.

The workshops stressed key points of visioning as a synthesis of the approaches of Ames (2006), Ayres (1996) and Walzer et al. (1995) through workshop handouts and structured roundtable discussions. Participants learned about techniques and action steps necessary to implement the visioning process in each community.

Basic expectations of visioning were also presented. The threshold of involving 15 percent of the community population (correspondingly ranging from 20 community members to more than 700) was used to encourage community involvement. The communities were given the flexibility to craft their own process and design in implementing a visioning program. A series of specific ideas and activities were included that could be used in the various steps and stages. The visioning activities and events were planned as a collaborative effort between the coach, steering
committee, and interested residents. The marketing and planning of the effort was undertaken by community members with help from the Leadership Team.

The outcomes of the program involved both tangible projects that participants described in their respective vision statements and action plans, as well as more intangible results such as increased networking in the community and trust among community residents. Table 5.2 illustrates the more significant tangible outcomes from participating communities with descriptions of outcome listed.

The outcomes illustrate the most popular or significant programs in the communities but the list is, by no means, exhaustive. These outcomes merely document the changes in the communities that were observable and readily measurable.

**Methodology**

Five focus groups and 14 one-on-one interviews were held after the completed visioning program to review the program delivery and outcomes and gain a better understanding of key factors and/or strategies that led to a successful outcome. The focus groups sessions and the interviews were supplemented by participant observations throughout the visioning process. The focus groups and interviews that began in fall 2008 were completed in spring 2009. They took place in five participating communities and involved 42 participants in the visioning program. Members from all the communities including community coaches, steering committee members, and community residents were invited to participate. At least one individual was recruited to represent a community, or group of communities, in proximity to the communities where the focus groups were held. The sessions were recorded on a digital recorder with detailed notes taken during the sessions.

This research design permitted an in-depth and longitudinal study of multiple cases from both a single and holistic perspective (Yin, 2002). Cases can thus be used to study the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences both within and between the various communities. A case study methodology provides a better understanding of the process by concentrating on specific approaches used, the process followed, and resulting outcomes within and between each community. The research methodology is exploratory and descriptive relying mainly on this case study design. The goal was not to find statistically generalizable data. Rather, it was to capture a range of experiences or belief systems in rich detail with greater attention to specificity of key elements in the community process and increase the depth of understanding of process and outcome (Patterson & Williams, 2001).

Consequently, the approach was not to provide quantitative measures for statistical inference. Instead, a representative sample of participants in the visioning exercises provided detailed narratives of their experiences. The results reveal what many or most respondents described regarding the direction, guidance and training they received before the visioning program began in their communities, and how this preparation influenced the outcome.

The case studies allow a thorough assessment of the community from which to understand and explore unique characteristics and provide an in-depth and contextual exploration of the community visioning processes. This approach is especially useful in assessing change within complex adaptive systems where interaction among multiple networks makes predicting outcomes difficult (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999).

In addition to basic demographic and logistical information, five open-ended questions were used to guide the conversations during the focus group sessions and personal interviews conducted by the lead author and with other members of the MSU Extension Leadership Team. The focus group questions included:

1. Tell us about the direction, guidance and training you received before and during the workshops on community visioning?
2. What worked well and what could the Leadership Team have improved?
3. Describe the positive changes that have taken place in your community as a result of the visioning process, both short-term and long-term?
4. Specifically, how has community visioning and the resulting actions benefited your community? Your region?
5. What specific projects have resulted from the program?
Responses from the focus group members generated a rich data set of descriptions and personal narratives. Key words and themes were identified to better understand similarities and differences in each community associated with the visioning process. The main intent was to use open-ended responses to generate descriptions and narratives to better understand the specifics of how the visioning process worked and how it overcame challenges in each community.

A final coding scheme was used as a framework to summarize and represent major themes across all the communities. This coding scheme represents principal topics, ideas, and perspectives emerging from group sessions and interviews that were shared among many or all those involved in the process. These major themes are presented as research results in addition to descriptions and explanations pertaining to their context and purpose. The themes resulting from the data analysis form the basis of the theoretical framework are presented below.

**Theoretical Framework**

The results of the data analysis provide the following framework with five principles that can guide teaching future community visioning. Each principle is supported by related literature and discussed in terms of application in the case study.

**Principle 1: Instill a sense of “ownership” in the visioning process and outcome**

This research clearly demonstrated the importance of ownership in the visioning process and in outcomes of the process in each community. Case study participants repeatedly discussed and described attributes of ownership during the course of the visioning process and outcomes. The attributes included detailed discussions of the importance of engaging the community in dialogue from the beginning; actively allowing the community to participate and influence the process of identifying and mobilizing community assets; and making explicit the power-sharing concept of the process and outcome. All of these attributes of ownership suggest the concept is relevant for bringing stakeholders to the table and networking with partners to support the community process.

Ultimately, a sense of ownership is predicated on power and empowerment. Community residents appreciated the degree of influence they exercised over decision-making in both the visioning process and its outcome. Many reported that ownership was fundamental to the success of the project and to achieving an active interest and presence by many diverse members in the process. When a community’s sensibility changes from looking to the outside for solutions to understanding that they must build their community’s future, an increase in the level of cultural capital in terms of changing patterns of thinking and mobilizing for change happens (cultural capital is discussed in more detail later).

Examples from the focus groups presented below illustrate the importance of community ownership in the process and outcome. Respondents recognized that the community itself was responsible for crafting a vision and implementing related actions as illustrated by the following quote:

It was only after we started visioning that we understood how much utility and power could be generated. I don’t think any community wants somebody from a university or a foundation to come in and say “we’re going to fix your community for you.” That’s not a good way to start. Good people in our community invested a lot of time and we did come up with a community vision. I’m eternally optimistic about things.

Another respondent conveys a similar sentiment explaining that the current leadership in the community initiated the visioning process to involve the entire community to discuss its future and the positive steps necessary to attain common goals:

I think if the community really wants to change it needs to come from within. The present leadership needed to say “Hey, our town needs help, our community needs help. We want to change,” rather than someone saying “Hey, here’s a program, we’re going to do this to you.” I’m positive that the program has started people thinking and has made a difference and it may be slow and it may be baby steps, but I do think positive things have come and will come through that.

The following respondent notes that tapping into community talent is necessary to “fix” or address current issues and can help achieve a common vision:

The one thing that I see happening was that we knew someone wasn’t going to come in and be our “big fix.” And we also knew that we’re not going to get some big industry to come in here and fix it. We needed to look at what our strong suits were, within the community, and within the people that were here. And we had this vision of using our own talent.

This last example specifically mentions ownership over the process and outcome and the inherent loss of control by some as a result of the many individuals who become empowered through the process:

It was community pride and the idea of empowering individuals regardless of their income level, to feel like they can participate, was probably a big goal of ours. That no matter what your income level, there’s a way that you can contribute and be a part of the process. Visioning was basically a strategic planning process where you’re asking for the community to identify what is important. And you have to allow the community a certain amount of ownership to be able to pick the outcomes that they want to work on... I mean you almost lose control over that a little bit because it’s a community
process. We're empowering the community to pick the things that they would think are important . . . If any of us is going to succeed, the community really has to have ownership in that. And, those things that they took ownership in may or may not have had real direct measurable results.

Enhancing public involvement in community planning and development efforts has been promulgated as developing and acquiring “buy-in” which signifies the support, involvement, or commitment of interested or affected parties to a community development proposal, plan, strategy or decision. The term “sense of ownership” is increasingly cited as a significant characteristic of community development. A sense of ownership in community development is described as a concept to assess whose voice is heard, who has influence over decisions and who is affected by the process and outcome (Lachapelle, 2008).

The term ownership (or sense of ownership) is increasingly cited as a critical element in determining the potential for this buy-in and consequently public involvement in community planning and development efforts. For example, ownership has been specifically referenced in community development contexts (Watt et al. 2000; Simpson et al., 2003; Besant, 2005; Bowen, 2005; Zimmerman & Meyer, 2005). Definitions of ownership in various community planning contexts are diffuse and scattered across disciplines, but there is some conceptual homogeneity. For example, Druskat and Pescosolido (2002, p. 291) define ownership as “a psychological sense of ownership . . . that changes one’s relationship to work by strengthening feelings of responsibility and influence over how it gets done, and by increasing the amount of pride and identity invested in outcomes.” Mayhew et al. (2007, p. 477), psychological ownership involves “feelings of possessing an individual’s self-concept, attitudes, values, and demonstrable behavior.” Others describe psychological ownership as a critical component of team building and collective action (O’Driscoll et al., 2006; Pierce et al., 2001). This growing body of scholarship, as well as responses in the current research, suggests the term and concept to be increasingly significant in community planning and development.

**Principle 2: Understand the importance of “personality of place”**

The interviews demonstrated the significance of both the concept of “sense of place” in terms of community interest and participation in the vision program, as well as the “personality of place.” Both community members and the Leadership Team came to recognize that each community was different and thus each approach or strategy to design and implement a visioning process must be tailored to the community. Overwhelmingly, respondents reported that cookie-cutter solutions would not function well in terms of imposing a generic program with little room for local input on design and implementation.

The workshop sessions involved roundtable discussions on how the personality of place could be best understood and exploited positively in each community. All participants in the visioning process were encouraged to first gain a thorough understanding of the “personality” of their community by identifying special strengths and assets. Unique experiences related to the visioning process were discussed and recorded so that participants could learn from each other and from peer communities. After this detailed discussion, members felt they were much better prepared to address a visioning process in their community.

As an example, one community held a barn dance with a pitchfork fondue to celebrate their unique agricultural base and tradition. Another community provided paper pendants at the county fair and encouraged attendees to write or draw their visioning statements, which were then flown in a popular fair location. The sharing of these unique experiences and an examination of the personality of the place provided a greater understanding as well as a sense of pride and inspiration for workshop participants, again significantly impacting the stock of local cultural capital by changing core patterns in how community members think about, and engage within, their community.

Many respondents in the focus groups recognized the importance of understanding and promoting unique characteristics within their community or region. The first example provides evidence of the community’s understanding of issues associated with the aging population in the area and how that could be a positive resource to carry out the community’s vision:

One of the things that we noted is the aging of our population and that there’s going to be a huge turnover of wealth in the next probably ten or fifteen years. And so, we discussed how we’re able to capture some of that and keep that in the community towards community projects.

Respondents were also aware of the capacity lacking in the community in terms of organizations and groups necessary to undertake special tasks. The next example provides evidence of gaining an understanding of the place in order to identify assets and needs:

We’re just a very small community and we did not have any sort of cohesive organization going on at all. We had a lot of little groups out there, doing their little projects but not working together. As a result, we have tried to pull the community together to kind of come up with a mission statement and a vision so that we are working towards the same goal. We have had some success and some growing pains. But, it’s a whole process because we were starting from the get-go by understanding our community.

A myriad of scholarship addresses the importance of “sense of place” or “place attachment” regarding the potential for mobilizing community members to participate in and implement community plans, policies, and decisions. Research conducted
in environmental psychology, cultural geography, and political science demonstrates that place attachment can shape individual and group identity, which in turn contributes to socio-political stability and functionality.

Research, including neighborhood studies by Brown and Werner (1985) and Mesch and Manor (1998), reveals how shared experience and the development of contact and intimacy build attachment or connection to place. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's (1996) study found that place contributes to the development of individual self-efficacy and self-esteem as well as a shared sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem. Likewise, Thedori (2001) found that attachment to a community is positively associated with the perceived well-being of the individual. Others, including Kemmis (1990) and Austin (2004) suggest that place attachment can contribute to the ability of social groups to positively respond to social, political, and economic challenges. Place attachment often means a greater willingness to engage in collective action or more responsible community behavior to maintain or enhance valued attributes of the setting (Davenport & Anderson, 2005; Payton et al., 2005; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). This concept is articulated by Stedman (2002, p. 577), who finds, "we are willing to fight for places that are more central to our identities and that we perceive as being in less-than-optimal condition." In summary, sense of place is a social construct that is shaped by human engagement as much as it is shaped by the physical attributes of a space (Tuan, 2004).

By comparison, the personality of place describes how sense of place or place attachment is practiced and experienced by its inhabitants in any given location. The unique characteristics of how residents view the present and envision the future is what defines the personality of place. This spatial personality involves the collective dynamic of human interaction and engagement, both positive and negative within the community.

**Principle 3: Emphasize leadership development**

The visioning process in each community was preceded by a coordinated and formal leadership development program lasting three to five months. The leadership development training was open to all community members at no cost. Several community members (often the coach and members of the steering committee) were selected to serve as leadership training facilitators. A three-day training session was organized to familiarize facilitators with the leadership development materials and help them become well-versed in facilitation techniques. Nine different topical areas were covered during 36 hours of meetings (most communities held one to two-hour leadership sessions over many months). The topics covered included conflict management, identifying individual and group leadership assets, communication techniques, strategic planning, and visioning.

Most participants in the case study commented on the significant changes that took place in each community because of the leadership trainings. In particular, participants felt that the leadership trainings brought community members together and began to build positive relationships, established trust between diverse groups of individuals, and introduced basic principles of community visioning to better prepare the community for the visioning process. Many commented that leadership training was the basis for a community to reflect on its past, understand current trends, and begin to craft a vision for the future. Identifying leaders in the community was seen as integral to crafting this vision and implementing necessary actions to realize community goals and objectives. The opportunity for discussion and interaction helped community members co-construct both a new community vision as well as new roles for themselves in that process thus increasing the stock of positive cultural capital.

While respondents provided many examples of the importance of leadership development in the community related to conducting the visioning process and subsequent action planning, the following quote provides evidence relating leadership to the team work necessary for visioning:

"It's unrealistic for a town to hit the lottery and to expect someone to come in and fix all your problems. Really, the way to become a wealthier community is to take some pride in ourselves and I think the leadership program does help build that confidence. It encourages team work. We have definitely seen some new leadership, different people, through the program. One person, she's now involved and she will tell you "I didn't have the confidence and didn't feel part of the community." Well, now she's very much part of the community.

Leadership training was also purported to influence the willingness of a new cadre of individuals to run for office:

In several communities, new local officials were elected and they were participants in the leadership training. One person that was elected was a write-in candidate. And, he said "They were talking about leadership and I wanted to see if I could be one." He stepped up because he saw a need for leadership. It's really an enduring impact here, in our community.

Many respondents also recognized that leadership training was fundamental to any type of community change effort as exemplified by the following comment. "I think that leadership training and awareness is the basis for all of the improvements made and any strategies implemented. Offering leadership training was really the most important aspect."

In addition, the training increased social capital by enhancing the level of trust and reciprocity strengthening existing networks, and creating new partnerships (Flora & Flora, 2008; Bourdieau, 1986; Putnam, 2000). By creating a safe space for members to discuss things they value, participation in the training expanded the "radius of trust" (Fukuyama, 1999; p. 2). In this way, the training contributed to the development of bonding social capital across existing groups and organizations strengthening the capacity of the community to successfully collaborate. In addition,
the leadership training exposed community members to resources outside the community, expanding the stock of bridging social capital involving loose ties to outside organizations and other communities (Narayan, 1999).

The literature on leadership in terms of both community development theory and application is abundant and growing (Emery et al., 2007; Wituk et al., 2005; Pigg, 1999). The importance of leadership development in community visioning has also been discussed but to a more limited degree (Walzer et al., 1995; Ayres, 1996).

**Principle 4: Use a well-trained coach and steering committee**

The concept of a community coach was described and discussed at the workshops to ensure a clear understanding of this role in the process. The term was described to workshop participants as distinct from individual, business or organizational coaching in that the basic objective is to engage participants at the community-level and support them in developing the capacity to identify and achieve their own goals. It was explained to workshop participants that contrary to the mentoring and expert model – common in many traditional Extension outreach functions (Green & Haines, 2008) – the community members themselves were the “experts” and would guide and carry out all aspects of the visioning process. A coach position description was prepared and distributed to all participants. This process allowed a clear set of responsibilities to be outlined and understood from the beginning, along with a better understanding of expectations and outcomes from the perspective of the coach. Among the most important roles of the coach was to establish a steering committee representing a diverse and inclusive set of interests and experiences in each community. While challenges to creating this committee were often discussed, coaches and steering committee members felt that the time spent to establish a well-functioning steering committee was necessary since this committee would be largely responsible for a majority of the visioning work in each community.

Overwhelmingly, community members participating in the focus groups and interviews viewed the community coach as integral to the visioning program. Comments were made frequently about the critical role of the coach to continually remind the steering committee and community members to focus on group learning, capacity-building, finding and building partnerships, and developing an inclusive, diverse and collaborative process. The focus of coaching is much on capacity-building as on the specific change effort. Successful coaching leads to significant changes in the patterns of thinking and doing required for building capacity, especially the capacity to work together and to collaborate with others.

The coordination of efforts in communities by a coach and a steering committee was described by many respondents as integral to the success of the visioning effort as exemplified by the following quote:

Having a coach just makes a huge difference; dedicated people, the key people in town that just keep working at it. And, you might not see it, and I’m sure they get frustrated, but it does turn the light on in a few people. And those few people were able to help turn the light on somewhere else . . . The coach was able to get all the meetings organized so that when they have their meetings everything is taken care of.

Coaches were also seen as a resource for finding additional information and connecting and partnering with others in the region and beyond as described by the following respondent:

A dedicated coach was tremendously helpful. We helped with sharing information and hearing the ideas shared back and forth between communities. But, even just somebody sending a message to me, as a coach saying “Hey, have you done this yet? Have you been able to get any information?” Just somebody to help champion the process and help us move forward. To be able to keep us on track.

While there is an abundance of scholarly work on the use of a coach in personal or professional development such as corporate leadership building or personal training (Garman et al., 2000; Flaherty, 1999; Hudson, 1999), the emergence of scholarship applied to community coaching is now beginning to flourish (Luther & Emery, 2003; Emery et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2008).

The role of the coach is to build community capacity by encouraging positive relationships and networking. The community coach works to coordinate the entire community effort and encourage an inclusive process, allow dialogue and reflective practice, model collaborative practices, facilitate co-learning, and be neutral while pushing the process forward; all of which are behaviors that can effectively be modeled for steering committees. In short, as Luther and Emery (2003, p. 73) suggest, good coaching does not “give people answers or solutions, but rather leads them to a new perspective.” A community coach, as defined by Emery, Hubbell and Salant (2005, p. 1), “is a guide who supports communities and organizations in identifying and achieving their goals.”

Alternatively, Cohen, Higgins, Sanyal, and Harris (2008, p. 71) define community coaching as:

- an adaptive practice tailored to unique community contexts to guide systemic change via participant empowerment. Unlike an athletic coach who sends in the plays, a community coach guides and empowers participants to create and execute their own playbook.

Thus, the coach assists and promotes the community development process, without being a direct participant in the activities.

Unlike a more passive facilitator who may organize or guide a meeting, coaching is more substantive and functions at three levels. At the simplest level, a coach can
help shape an itinerary and identify resources. At the second level, the coach may help identify alternative routes, strategies to avoid construction and add to the journey's value. At the third level, transformational coaching assists in identifying new destinations and visions of possible futures, while helping community members address "elephants in the room" and the various opportunities that may be present or possible (Emery & Hubbell, 2009). Participants in several roundtables with community coaches, funders, and organizations facilitating coaching created a framework to facilitate an understanding of the community coaching process:

Community coaches work with the whole group/team, the leaders, and sometimes on a one-on-one basis. They assist as community leaders assess their readiness to participate in the project. They coach for results as they help the team get unstuck and move forward. Coaches help leaders develop strong trusting relationships within the team and across the community, and they help create relationships that link leaders to resources, information, and potential partners. Coaches play a key role in crafting opportunities for leaders to learn from their experiences by creating space for reflection. Coaches also encourage leaders to reach out to the whole community, to stretch beyond the first glance of what is possible, and reach for a more vibrant and sustainable community. Finally, coaching can assist leaders in developing and monitoring sustainable and resilient strategies for change.

**Principle 5: Provide consistent program support**

Many participants in the case study commented on the importance of quality support available throughout the program period. In addition to the financial support that proved invaluable, participants knew they were part of a larger movement around the state participating in "something bigger." The security of knowing that their visioning process coincided with so many other communities brought a degree of comfort and empathy since communities received updates on the progress of peer communities and could exchange and learn from others experiencing issues related to their visioning process.

The intent of the program however, was not to build a culture of dependency and entitlement. Far from it; instead, the goal was to build capacity to ensure communities had the skills and motivation to carry on the process and outcomes after program support, in terms of both financial and professional resources, no longer available from the Leadership Team.

Many respondents described the financial support provided to them from the Leadership Team and the related guidance on starting a community foundation as detailed below:

We have a partnership with an organization to see over our newly-established community endowment. And so I think that's probably the single most lasting thing that has come out of this. We struggled when we got to the whole community visioning process on where we wanted to go with a broader vision and we decided to pursue the endowment. As a result of that, we saw that there were lots of good community ideas for projects, but not really necessarily a way to fund them. So, we kind of merged those two ideas together. Now we have a way to perpetuate funds and projects down the road.

The support that communities received through grant-writing workshops was also detailed by many respondents as a lasting benefit of the program:

We were able to secure an after-school program grant. And, so our younger kids have a really good program going now. And, all of this is because we were involved with the program. We were able to establish the connections that helped us get these funds coming into us. And, so I think that's probably been the biggest thing, I believe, that we've learned.

While this last principle may appear an axiom for the success of any program, or a community visioning program in particular, we felt it necessary to discuss and describe this topic as it relates to our case studies. Support in various forms was provided by the Leadership Team throughout the entire visioning process. The support included small grants to the communities (termed "Barrier Elimination Funds") to be used to promote participation in all phases of the project including providing child care and transportation to meetings and events. In addition, the university offered other resources to the communities including faculty to assist with grant writing or consultation on community projects, free periodic webinars for community members to learn and share with each other on various topics related to their progress, and books and related information on community development in general and visioning in particular. In addition, a community blog network was created so that communities could share their progress, not only locally, but with communities around the state and region. Thus, this design for a visioning process also leads to significant increases in human and social capital, especially in creating the weak ties to other organizations and agencies related to bridging social capital.

**Conclusions**

The lessons learned from focus groups of visioning participants in Montana suggest certain elements of visioning that must be cultivated if the outcomes are to live beyond the program phase and have meaning to participants. In many regards, the five principles outlined in this chapter can serve to structure a community visioning process in other situations, however dissimilar in format. Nevertheless, given the consistent visioning model prescribed through the Horizons program, (though there was variation in each community), and the specific circumstances of the program (i.e. primarily rural and higher than average poverty rates), there may be implications regarding broad application of the aforementioned principles. We note that the lack of variation in the type of visioning process used within Horizons program may influence the overall generalizability of the framework and overall applicability of the model to other communities. Nevertheless, applying the framework in other
community settings, even those contextually dissimilar from the case studies, could prove useful in guiding residents and practitioners involved in process design and implementation.

What we have found is that foremost, all visioning programs should have a trained community coach, whether formal or informal. Indeed, community leaders often comment, “that they would not have succeeded without the coach.” Coaches not only set ground rules, encourage neutral dialogue, model reflective practice, foster relationships, and ultimately help the community both achieve and own its goals, but they also provide training to local organizers of visioning programs: training in facilitation, conflict resolution, event planning, marketing, and partnership-building. After all, if the community does not own the process by taking part in its creation and implementation, then there is little likelihood that participants will reach a shared understanding of the problems and opportunities, and, more importantly, mobilize to act. While the responsibilities of a “coach” may not feel concrete to implementers of community visioning, consider the fact that a coach’s modeling behavior often results in a steering or organizing committee developing the capacity to implement a process to address future community issues, crises, and opportunities. For the implementers of community visioning, this signifies that there could be less need for external change agents in the future to catalyze local problem solving.

Community practitioners must also recognize the “personality of place.” The characteristics that foster a sense of human attachment and belonging are integral to developing a collective understanding of a community’s needs, problems, and future opportunities. Thus, visioning programs must be tailored to each community by engaging the community in the process of designing, planning, and implementing the visioning process.

The Montana study also illustrates the importance of processes that focus on building the intangible capitals: human, social and cultural. Cultural capital is often overlooked, but as the focus group participants made clear, changing the patterns related to thinking and doing in the community was critical to mobilizing for change.

Finally, if there is hope that the outcomes of visioning will live beyond the structured dialogue, then there must be local leadership and consistent program support to nurture and support that leadership with community resources, human capacity, and information to move forward. Leadership development happens at many levels in the visioning process. For some, it grows from community coaching. For others, it is something that emerges when a passion or conviction is brought to the surface as a result of dialogue. Both sources of leadership must be cultivated. To ensure the level of training and support that community leaders need to engage in a successful visioning process, the implementers of a visioning program should consider that it can take many months or more of work with a community to prepare for the visioning dialogue. It can also take far longer to work with community groups on a post-visioning process to ensure that they have the resources, knowledge and information to bring their vision to reality.

Regarding future program design and delivery, there is clearly ample room for further discussion, debate, development, and expansion of these principles of community visioning pedagogy. As a pedagogical tool, these principles will only benefit from further refinement and articulation. Yet, we can’t help but hope they serve as a foundation toward developing a more refined community visioning pedagogy. More work is clearly needed in developing the various criteria essential for a visioning program, creating an evaluative schema to determine if an existing program is designed to achieve outcomes that are owned and sustained by the community, and ultimately, in teaching residents and practitioners the various theories, tools and techniques for planning and implementing a visioning process in their community. Future program design could include a community visioning handbook of practice with additional pedagogical techniques to further articulate these principles.

Community visioning has been shown to be an effective method of addressing a host of development issues. Implemented in the fashion described here, it does more than create a product—the vision, it also developed critically important assets in social, human, and cultural capital. For example, new relationships and partnerships were formed, trust was established and flourished, skills were developed in communication and grant writing, and new habits and practices of interaction and action were taking place to address community issues collectively. The use of fundamental principles as a theoretical framework to guide the teaching of those involved in visioning processes can only serve to promote successful implementation of a community’s vision. While future theoretical analysis, critique and expansion are expected and welcome, this research can serve as a useful tool in setting a foundation in the development of community visioning pedagogical theory and practice.

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### 6 THE IMPORTANCE OF INTANGIBLE OUTCOMES

**Charlie French and Paul Lachapelle**

Evaluating outcomes resulting from community visioning programs has beleaguered community practitioners for decades (Walzer, 1996). The challenge is due partly to the fact that not all outcomes are readily measurable. In particular, intangible outcomes — outcomes that can be neither seen nor touched — are difficult to assess. Intangible outcomes include enhanced leadership skills, increased social capital, sense of empowerment, and improved communication (French & Gagne, 2010). In contrast, tangible outcomes such as the generation of new revenue, construction of a community center, or conservation of naturally-significant lands are generally more conducive to being measured and tracked over time.

Because intangible outcomes are often described by scholars and community practitioners as “soft,” meaning they are difficult to measure or quantify, more attention and focus is often paid to the tangible outcomes. Yet, according to a recent study examining the range of outcomes achieved by 45 communities that underwent community visioning in New Hampshire cities and towns between 1996 and 2006, participants’ notion of “success” is not always associated with tangible or directly measurable outcomes, such as the development of new roads, bridges, and buildings or the creation of new jobs (French & Gagne, 2010). Rather, the building of social networks and new communication channels — and resulting reciprocity and increased political and social capital by using newsletters, town websites, and community celebrations, for example — were the most important outcomes for participants.

Given that intangible outcomes are as important, if not more important, to some community visioning participants as tangible outcomes, this chapter explores the types of outcomes resulting from community visioning, identifies what outcomes matter most to participants over the long term, and demonstrates how diverse outcomes can be measured and tracked over both the short- and long-term. The hope is that this discussion will provide insight into how best to evaluate diverse outcomes, both tangible and intangible.