

Leadership Training in Rural Alberta: What's in place, what works, what's needed

A report for the Agricultural Initiatives Program



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Executive Summary

The purpose of this study

This study was commissioned to examine leadership training in Alberta, including:

- An environmental scan of what leadership training and/or resources are already available in Alberta and neighbouring provinces
- Literature review to determine what worked well, and what was not effective in previous leadership training programs such as the Canadian Agriculture Lifetime Leadership Program (CALL) of a few years ago
- Interviews with participants from various agriculture leadership programs in Canada over the past thirty years
- Determining target focus groups for in-depth research into the perceived gaps in leadership skills in the agriculture community, including Agriculture Societies, and ideas of how best to fill those gaps
- Develop agenda and locations for focus groups, (but does not include the actual facilitating of focus groups)
- Research and report on various 'new technologies' (e.g. teleclasses, interactive ebooks) approaches to training and development appropriate to farm participants

What we found

There are essentially no significant Leadership Training Programs in rural Alberta. Programs from the past, such as REDA's Alberta LEAD Rural Leadership program, and the CALL (Canadian Agriculture Lifetime Leadership) program sponsored by the Canadian Farm Business Management Council were effective in many ways, but were restricted largely to leadership within the agriculture industry. They were also very restricted in the number of participants. For example each 'round' of the CALL program took a maximum of about 30 participants from across Canada every two years, with only about five from Alberta.

Programs in other areas

The *Ontario Advanced Agriculture Leadership Program*, and the *Atlantic Agricultural Leadership Program*, which are both very similar to the CALL program, are effective rural leadership development programs in other areas in Canada, but they focus mainly on agriculture.

There are a number of effective rural leadership/community development programs in the United States, such as the *Conway County Vision 2020 program* in Conway County, Arkansas, which is described in detail in the case study of the appendix.

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Some agencies in the United States, such as *The Heartland Center for Leadership Development* in Lincoln, Nebraska, or the *Rockwood Leadership Program* in Berkley, California, appear to have effective leadership/community development training programs, and bear further investigation as possible programs to use in Alberta.

What is needed

Effective leadership training/community development programs must be instigated, managed and carried out locally. A significant portion of the funding must also come from local sources if there is to be buy-in from those being 'developed'. What funding comes from outside the local area must be stable for a significant period, be locally managed, and have few strings attached.

A Train-the-Trainer program should be established, and perhaps mainly funded from government, to teach those who would like to instigate local training/development programs how to do so.

Focus Groups

We have not determined target focus groups for in-depth research into the perceived gaps in leadership skills in the agriculture community, nor developed an agenda and locations for focus groups. Dr. Scott MacLean, then at the University of Saskatchewan (mentioned below) did a literature review, a series of focus groups, questionnaires, and individual interviews with participants in previous leadership training programs. Some of the conclusions in this study are adapted from his work, and it seems redundant to do more focus groups, as conditions since his were done in 1996 have not changed in any fundamental way.

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The situation – decline in rural social structure and leadership

Presenting problems

Rural Alberta: Land of Opportunity identified a number of important challenges for rural Alberta.

Human resources

Rural communities are losing their youth and their skilled professionals, both sources of potential leadership.

Social infrastructure

Many areas are losing important services, such as schools, health care, and recreational and cultural programs which support economic and community development.

Physical infrastructure

Rural communities regard public buildings as community assets and want them used effectively. They are concerned about the affordability of essential services such as water treatment and community facilities. Many feel roads and other transportation services in their communities are not adequate.

Business and economy

International, national and local crises have had a disproportionate impact on rural communities. Opportunities exist for the diversification of the rural economy, but access to the necessary skills and tools, such as technology and financing, is limited.

Working together

Regional collaboration can help meet many of the challenges facing rural communities. Partnerships are seen as critical to successful rural development among communities, government ministries and industry.

Culture and quality of life

Preservation of their heritage and quality of life is essential to enhance the attractiveness of rural communities as good places to live and invest.

Environment

Good stewardship of the environment is seen as critical to maintaining industries such as agriculture and tourism, and as a source of economic diversification. However, rural Albertans are concerned that they bear the costs of good stewardship while all Albertans enjoy the benefits.

Government

Rural Albertans believe that government funding formulas, policies and regulations do not recognize their unique circumstances and that it is increasingly difficult to get rural concerns on the provincial agenda.

Other Issues Identified Through Interviews With Participants In This Study

- Leadership capacity must be renewed and replenished
- Hard to get volunteers – people are too busy

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- Accessing money for maintaining rural organizations of all kinds is a constant and growing issue
- There is a gap in communication, coordination and cooperation between rural administration groups (government agencies, town administration) and community leaders (e.g. leaders of Ag Societies, Boards of Trade, other community groups)
- Loss of community members leads to local businesses disappearing or moving to larger centres

The Alberta Government, in its rural development strategy identifies Four Pillars essential for sustainable rural communities. Leadership training supports all four of these pillars:

- **Economic growth** – providing opportunities for rural communities to develop strong economies and benefit fully from the Alberta Advantage
- **Community capacity, quality of life and infrastructure** – ensuring that rural communities have the capacity, the quality of life, and the infrastructure necessary to remain vibrant and attractive places to live, work and visit
- **Health care** – making sure people in rural Alberta have access to quality health services, recognizing the role rural health regions can play in health renewal, and providing opportunities to develop the economic potential of health care services
- **Learning and skill development** – providing excellent schools, access to the best possible education, and expanding opportunities in local communities for people to get the skills they need to compete and succeed in the marketplace.

Leadership Development

Now that we have described the situation, including the problems the Alberta Government and our own research have identified, and the ‘four pillars’ of the Alberta government’s rural strategy, we will look leadership: what it is, what training is needed, and what training exists.

What is leadership?

Simply put, Leadership is the capacity to be an agent for change in a given context, or put another way, a leader is one who coordinates without telling people what to do. It requires self-awareness.

There are two kinds of leadership: ‘Functional’ or ‘Transformational’; and ‘Positional’ or ‘Transactional’

Functional or Transformational Leadership

A person can be a Functional or Transformational Leader with or without holding a formal position of authority. The functional leader is one who takes individual initiative to start or lead

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some kind of action in the community. Functional leaders do often end up in Positional Leadership roles because of their willingness to act and take on responsibility.

The Functional Leader may be identified by others as having leadership potential, even before they see that potential in themselves.

James Burns, a journalist, studied leaders of nations and large social movements across the world, and identified two basic kinds of leadership: *transformational and transactional*. He defined transformational leadership as one person, the leader, engaging with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Their purposes, which might have started out as separate, but related, become fused. He contrasted it with what he described as *transactional leadership*.

Transformational leaders usually work through building relationships and have a strong urge for achievement. They are principles-centred, believe in and demonstrate honesty, integrity and trust.

Training needs for Functional leadership consist largely of personal growth and self-mastery training, plus training in team-building, communication, and managing conflict. Some skill training in their specific area of focus can be useful as well.

Positional or Transactional Leadership

A person assumes Positional or Transactional Leadership when he/she is appointed or elected to a formal position of authority, such as the head of an agency or organization.

Training needs for this type of leadership include learning to organize and run meetings; managing people (employees and/or volunteers); and administration.

Attributes of a good leader

In 2005, the Australian-based *Institute for International Research* carried out a survey of more than 200 private and public-sector senior executives and managers, asking them to rate the importance of various leadership attributes. Respondents rated an **ability to inspire** (47%), **vision** (23%), and **communication skills** (11%) as the three most important attributes of a good leader.

Conversely, **credibility** (4%), **ability to execute strategy** (8%), **attention to detail** (1%), **willingness to make unpopular decisions** (3%) and **ruthlessness** (2%) were all considered less important for a good leader. Not one respondent saw **track record** or **financial ability** to be important attributes for business leadership.

Further to this, Dr. Scott Mclean, formerly of the University of Saskatchewan, now at the University of Calgary, carried out a study in 1996 entitled: *Rural Leadership Development*

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in Western Canada: Needs Assessment and Program Planning.

The study consisted of literature reviews, focus groups, survey questionnaires and individual interviews with participants in:

- The Alberta LEAD Rural Leadership program
- The Canadian Farm Business Management Council's Rural Francophone Leadership program, and
- The Canadian Farm Business Management Council's Atlantic Agriculture Leadership program.

The study participants identified these key leadership characteristics:

- professional, well-rounded, positive, respected among peers
- competency (knowledgeable, clear thinking, able to conduct tasks)
- constantly learning and open to new ideas
- willing to identify and address new problems
- recognize that ideas have to come from many sources
- show courage by standing for their conviction
- focus on opportunities and not losses
- persistently work toward achieving the goal
- establish communication networks to keep people informed
- able to identify future consequences of actions and manage change (be able to anticipate, be adaptable, take risks)
- exhibit a positive sense of self-esteem
- encourage others to excel
- inspire a shared vision (be creative, be proactive, be a strategic thinker)
- set high expectations of themselves and others
- influence others (have self-confidence, be action-oriented, be determined)
- have a personal ethic (be authentic, be credible, be skilled at choosing good people to work with)
- build networks (have a global vision, build partnerships, be diplomatic)
- have personal integrity (honest, trustworthy, integrity, fair, hard working)
- be reflective (confident, secure, learn from mistakes, know one's limitations)
- have teamwork and people skills (build consensus, delegate, team player, supportive, seek input from others, open-minded, approachable, respectful of minority views, appreciative, motivational, able to compromise, diplomatic, well-networked, mentor, lead by example)
- have communication skills (informative, good listener, good public speaker, plain speaker, lobbyist, negotiator)
- have organizational management skills (action orientation, commitment, planning decision-making, focus, vision, innovation, adaptable, versatile, flexible, dynamic, passionate, willing to take risks, problem solving)

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There is a strong connection between Leadership training, community development, and community economic development

Dr. Vaughn Grisham, Professor of Sociology at the University of Mississippi and Director of *The McLean Institute For Economic Development* in Oxford, Mississippi, is a highly-respected expert in community development. He has worked in leadership and community/economic development in more than 30 states and two Canadian provinces and has helped to establish leadership development programs in more than 300 counties in more than 20 American states. Dr Grisham says:

“Though the details will vary, community development will still hinge on several principles: community growth begins with individual growth; local people must address local problems; successful development begins with small tangible goals – pick the low-hanging fruit first; team-building (and its accompanying personal commitment) are essential; and the real task for leaders is to be social architects who build human infrastructure.”

Attributes Of An Effective Leadership Training Program

The program should be focussed on developing both ‘Functional’ and ‘Positional’ skills.

- Training should emphasize personal development/personal mastery, in order to build confidence, trustworthiness, credibility with others, and in general to develop character. For example Bryan Perkins is a hog farmer at Wainwright, and was a participant in REDA’s *Alberta LEAD Rural Leadership program* during the mid-1970s. He is a leader in his community and in several regional and provincial organizations. He says that the several days they spent in a leadership program at the Banff Centre, which was focussed on personal growth, had the longest lasting impact on his leadership ability. He says other parts of the program, which focussed on skill-building and increasing their knowledge of the international agriculture industry were useful, but did not have the impact of the personal growth training.
- Training in group facilitation and team-building.
- Training in communication, including interpersonal, working with the media, and dealing with people at all levels of authority
- Training in strategic thinking/planning, and creating common goals/visions
- Training in conflict resolution and consensus building
- Training/exploration of community/economic development, including case studies of successful and unsuccessful attempts at community building
- Youth need to be included in the ‘adult’ leadership training programs. Everyone agrees it is important to try to keep youth from leaving their communities, or to encourage them to

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come back, but there are very few programs to address this problem, and rural organizations/administration do not include youth on boards or in decision-making

- The programs must be managed locally
- A local leadership training program should be at least ten or twelve days long, spread over twelve months, and be repeated every year in order to build leadership capacity in the community/region. The program should have a maximum of approximately twenty five participants per year, in order to have a large enough group for good interaction, but not be too large for full participation by every member.
- There may be some need for special ‘cultural’ training for clergy, pharmacists, bankers, etc. who are new to rural living and culture.

FUNDING

- Funding from outside the local area (e.g. government funding) must be stable for a significant period of time, and have no, or very few, strings attached
- A significant amount of the funding for the program must come from local sources in order to have buy-in. When programs are totally funded by out-of-area money, they usually flounder when the funding ends. For leadership training, and its benefits, to be sustainable, the people involved need to make a significant commitment in time and money. If there are not enough people/businesses/organizations in a community or region to make such a commitment, there is no good reason for outside money to foot the whole bill. The ‘Conway County Vision 2020’ program in Conway County, Arkansas ([see case study in the appendix](#)) seeks no government funding, and is totally funded by County residents and businesses.

Selecting Participants for a Leadership Training program

Enterprising/passionate individuals and small groups are important in sustaining rural communities and making them attractive to others. These folks must be encouraged. Some people are seen by others as leaders, or as having leadership potential, but do not see it in themselves. Others may wish to be ‘leaders’ out of self-interest, but are not seen by others as having leadership potential. An effective selection process is to have other community members nominate participants for the program. Those nominated must of course want to participate, and even if there is other funding, should pay something themselves in order to be part of the program.

Current Rural Leadership Training in Alberta

There is very little in the line of any kind of effective, ongoing leadership development programs for rural Albertans. In fact almost none.

Wild Rose Foundation Leadership Institutes (Discontinued)

Some chambers of commerce have held leadership programs sponsored by the Wild Rose *Leadership Training in Rural Alberta*

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Foundation in the past. However this program was at discontinued (least temporarily) as of fall, 2005. For a look at a typical Wild Rose Foundation Leadership Institute curriculum, [see the appendix](#).

We found no other rural leadership training programs in Alberta.

There are some short-term workshops, such as the one-day *Options & Opportunities* seminar in Camrose on February 9, 2006, whose aim is “bringing together local entrepreneurs and industry experts to offer innovative agricultural strategies and share successes, challenges and ideas to help producers become better business people and rural leaders”, but no ongoing programs aimed at developing leadership in rural areas.

For Youth: ACCA’s summer youth camps, 4H

ACCA (The Alberta Community And Cooperative Association - formerly REDA) has three summer youth programs, which focus on the three main subject areas: cooperative/credit unions, agriculture, and leadership training.

- Teen Seminars, for any young person who has completed grade 8 or 9, are designed to develop skills and confidence for teens to participate effectively in groups, clubs, etc.
- Youth Seminars, for those who have completed grade 10 or 11, are designed to develop skills and confidence in youth to actively take on leadership roles in organizations
- Grad Seminars, for those who have completed grade 11 or 12, are intended to develop positive attitudes and knowledge that will enable young adults to use their leadership skills in community organizations. More details are available at:
(<https://reda.onware.ca/prothos/onware.x/content.p?!'public'11345749692637'5'22334506&name'youth>)

4H has leadership training programs aimed at 4H leaders. Again, these programs are focussed mainly on ‘Positional’ leadership training for 4H club leaders. The 4H program itself helps build skills useful in leadership – speaking skills, self-confidence, how to run meetings, etc.

Other Programs/organizations/groups in rural Alberta that are focussed on agriculture/community economic and/or community/social development

Agriculture Societies

There are 294 Agriculture Societies in the province. Some are very active, but many could be categorized as ‘inactive’ in that they have few members, and sponsor or organize few events. Agricultural Societies’ purpose is to support the agriculture industry and rural development, organize agricultural events and operate community facilities such as halls, fairgrounds and arenas.

They support youth training at leadership camps, and support 4-H and other youth activities as well as providing educational scholarships. They sometimes partner with other service clubs to

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organize community events.

Agriculture Societies in general do not organize or sponsor rural leadership training programs. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development gives each society \$17,500 per year for operating capital, and if members take training courses, they can get the cost of the course reimbursed at the end of the year, if they apply for it before that year's money is depleted. The two major barriers to members getting training are time and money, which are problems in most rural areas.

Because most Ag Societies are run by volunteers, board members may either change often, or conversely, they may be the same people for a long time, as others are not willing to take on the roles.

The larger Agriculture Societies, such as Camrose, Lloydminster, Northlands, and the Calgary Stampede have paid staff, who are also trained, which makes them far more active and successful than most of the smaller Societies.

Smaller Societies are having a harder time. For example Jo MacDonald, President of the Lakedell Ag Society said they have plans to build a new curling rink, using geothermal heating. They also plan to bring the community library on site. But it is harder to get enough grant money now, and with more stringent building codes, they have to use trades people to do most of the building, instead of having members contribute in-kind work. With some funding having been capped, and buildings are more expensive, they now have to provide half the money instead of the quarter they used to. Even with creative fund-raising activities such as the Curling Club putting on a dinner theatre with curling club members acting in it, and supportive community members, it is difficult to raise enough money. It is also harder to get farmers to do 'in kind' work, as they are too busy.

Many of the old Ag Society buildings throughout the province were built in the 70s, and need either major repairs, or to be replaced.

Sirrolli Institute Canada (<http://www.sirrolli.com/>)

Enterprise Facilitation as developed by Ernesto Sirrolli has proven to be very successful in Australia, where it began 20 years ago, and in a number of states in the US, notably Nebraska, where it has been running for 15 years, and Kansas among others. The *Sirrolli Institute Canada* was started in the mid-1990s by Yvonne Fizer, and is very active with projects in the US and the UK, but with little happening in Canada. The Institute has helped Camrose, Stettler and Fairview Enterprise Facilitation projects get started, but for various reasons they have floundered.

While not a leadership training program, Enterprise Facilitation does have an impressive record in

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helping entrepreneurs in rural areas launch and sustain businesses. These successful business operators often take on leadership roles in their communities. A case study of a successful program in Kansas can be seen at:

http://www.sirolli.com/press/archive/2005/enterprise_facilitation_in_ks.pdf

NXLevel Canada (<http://www.nxlevel.ca/>)

Tilling the Soil of Opportunity is a farm business planning program designed for farm managers who are planning to add an enterprise, or who want to improve their management of enterprises they are operating now. The 10-session course is delivered in three-hour sessions, weekly over twelve weeks. The program is facilitated by NxLevel certified business trainers along with local experts from the local community.

Courses are being offered in fifteen communities this winter, mainly through the Community Futures/Community Development offices in the participating communities.

The NxLevel™ Entrepreneurial Training Program was initially funded by a grant from the U S WEST Foundation to the University of Colorado at Denver, and the entrepreneurial training programs were beta tested in 1996. Programs include training for:

- [Business Start-ups](#)
- [Existing Business / Entrepreneur](#)
- [Enterprising Youth](#)
- [Micro-Entrepreneurs](#)
- [Agricultural Entrepreneurs](#)

NxLevel has expanded into 47 states, more than 600 communities, and 7 countries. It is now the largest entrepreneurial network in the world. Licensing rights for Canada were purchased by the Microbusiness Training Centre of Edmonton in 2002.

Again, this is not a leadership training program, but is aimed at creating successful agriculture entrepreneurs.

Community Futures Development Corporations

There are 27 Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) throughout Alberta. Their purpose is largely community economic development, and they are staffed by paid professional workers, funded through the federal government. They do not offer any rural leadership training.

Programs outside of Alberta

The Ontario Advanced Agriculture Leadership Program

This program was established in 1985 by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural

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Affairs (OMAFRA), the University of Guelph, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Federation of Rural Living. Program design is very similar to REDA's former Alberta LEAD program, and the CALL program, all of which were modelled on a leadership program developed by the Agricultural Economics department of Michigan State University and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 1965. There are many such programs now, and a list of them can be seen on the website of the International Association of Programs for Agricultural Leadership: <http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/karl/iapal.htm>.

In 1996, a study was carried out by a group from the University of Guelph to assess the economic returns to the Ontario Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program. The study found the Leadership Development Program gave a very high return on investment. A quote from the report's conclusions:

Through leadership training graduates of AALP have been able to influence the direction and course of the evolution of Ontario agriculture and have helped the sector develop a competitive position both domestically and abroad. According to the economic measures derived in this study, this has generated a very substantial benefit both within the general economy and the agricultural sector.

The benefits of leadership training through AALP projected to 2005 provide a benefit-cost ratio of 25:1, comparable to the returns on agricultural research. This indicates that the benefits here are long lasting and commitments to supporting leadership training is a sound social and public investment.

The benefit-cost ratios of the aggregate measures are extremely high. Benefits from past activities generated a ratio of 53:1, and when projected to 2005 generate a rate of return of 179:1.

The reason these ratios are so high can be explained by the fact that leadership training develops the capacity in individuals to deal with all kinds of situations as they come up.

In particular, with individuals in senior positions of leadership, the benefits of making the right decision can be tremendous, and similarly the costs of making the wrong decision can also have substantial impacts. Therefore the ability to choose correctly between alternatives, the ability time after time to make good decisions will have far reaching effects. The experts that were consulted in the study indicated that despite the pressures facing agriculture, the course of development taken by Ontario agriculture, directed by Ontario agricultural leaders, is most positive. They believe that because of leadership training Ontario agricultural leaders have developed the capabilities to make good decisions which have had tremendous leverage within the sector. (P. 60)

This program, like others of its kind, is aimed at developing specifically agricultural leaders, but their positive effect on rural communities is significant. A rural leadership training program would

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do well to incorporate many of the features of this program.

Atlantic Agricultural Leadership Program

This program is designed very similarly to the Ontario Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program, and we assume provides similar results, although we know of no study to verify them.

University of Brandon, Rural Development Institute

The University of Brandon's *Rural Development Institute*, in collaboration with communities in four regions of Manitoba and the Kivalliq region of Nunavut, federal, provincial and territorial government departments and agencies, and non-government organizations, carried out a Community Collaboration Project (CCP) from 1999 to 2004. Four regional round tables (RRTs) were established. According to the Institute, the project delivered these outcomes:

“the building of relationships among CCP stakeholders; the development of trusting relationships and increased communication between the community members and government officials; leadership development within the RRTs and the steering committee; capacity building among the RRTs and steering committee members; and exploration into new models of decision-making and governance among communities and governments.” (CPP fact sheet, January, 2006)

The Rural Development Institute received funding from the federal government's Rural Secretariat to carry out *Community Collaboration Project: Empowering Communities and Building Capacity 2005 – 2008*. This project is designed to discover whether the Rural Development Institute's *Community Collaboration Project* (CCP) model can be effective in other areas. Rural Teams have been established in Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Yukon, and the project is getting underway.

International:

There are leadership/community development programs of various kinds throughout the world, but three we thought warranted further investigation are listed here. We have not visited these centres, but by talking to the staff from them, and/or others who have taken training course from them, we felt they deserve particular mention as models for rural/community leadership development.

The MacLean Institute for Community Development, University of Mississippi

This is in some ways the 'grandfather' of rural development programs. It is run Dr. Vaughn Grisham, Professor of Sociology at the University of Mississippi. It is based on the work of George MacLean, who was publisher of a newspaper in Tupelo, Mississippi, and who wanted to improve conditions in his community. Dr. Grisham consults with communities throughout the United States, and abroad, and offers some training programs at the MacLean Institute. His

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model is employed by the Conway County Vision 2020 project described in detail in the case study below.

Heartland Center for Leadership Development

(<http://www.heartlandcenter.info/index.htm>)

The Heartland Center is an independent non-profit organization whose mission is to help local leaders respond to current and future challenges in their communities.

The Center offers several training programs for rural communities, among them *Home Town Competitiveness: A Blueprint for Community Builders*.

Here is a quote from their website:

The comprehensive approach of HTC encourages communities to take action in four strategic areas—leadership, youth, entrepreneurship and charitable assets. Leadership development strives to strengthen the capacity of residents to improve and sustain their community. The goal of youth development is to support and enhance the idea of adults and youth working together to create opportunities for youth to stay in or return to the community. The purpose of developing charitable assets is to strengthen and sustain charitable giving at the local level in order to build an endowment that will sustain local civic institutions and create a new source of opportunity capital for community economic development efforts. The efforts of entrepreneurial development work to identify and assess entrepreneurial talent in the community and to devise an economic development strategy to increase entrepreneurial business development.

The Rockwood Leadership Program, Berkley California

(www.rockwoodfunc.org)

The Rockwood Leadership Program is a non-profit organization that promotes social change through leadership training and consulting to progressive non-profits. While not strictly a rural leadership organization, it does provide leadership training appropriate for rural communities.

Their website describes their courses:

We are a team of skilled and experienced trainers and consultants — people who have spent decades working with Fortune 500 companies and nationally recognized leadership training organizations. And who have experienced first-hand the unique challenges facing non-profit organizations.

Here is what we offer:

- The *Art of Leadership*, a three-day training on the most critical organizational as well as inner skills necessary for successful, lasting social change work

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- *Leading from the Inside Out*, an advanced training in personal effectiveness for graduates of the Art of Leadership
- Consultations for organizations and coalitions, custom-designed to meet the challenges of particular groups or efforts

Conway County Vision 20-20

This is a specific leadership/community development project in Conway County, Arkansas. Details are in the case study below. The small group that started this project brought Dr. Vaughn Grisham in nine years ago to help them figure out how to ‘develop’ their county. The resultant program has seen many positive changes in Morrilton, the county seat, and the entire county.

Conway County was a ‘backward’ rural county, with larger, more successful neighbouring counties on its borders. Citizens had a defeatist attitude, and did not see any potential for growth in the county. A group of three committed citizens formed a vision for the future of the county, and worked to establish a development program. They promoted, and found funding for a yearly training class to build leadership capacity in the county. To date more than 275 citizens have been through the year-long program, and benefits, such as new businesses, and a positive attitude in the county are now evident.

The program was particularly critical when seven years ago two of the three major employers in the county announced they were closing their factories within two weeks of each other, which meant the county of 19,000 citizens would lose 1200 of their 2000 permanent industrial jobs. Because the Vision 2020 program was already in place, the county was not demoralized and overwhelmed, as it may well have been without it.

A rural leadership/development program designed for Alberta would benefit from employing many of the features of this project design.

The role of distance technology

With the significant distances that must be covered in rural areas, the time and cost of travelling can be prohibitive. Distance technology can be useful when training trainers. On a local level, it is likely far less critical.

Following is a brief description of the strengths and weaknesses of various distance technologies.

Webinars

Webinars are simply seminars, or meetings, held on the world wide web. They employ a variety of web technologies, such as ‘voice over internet protocol’ which allows participants to talk to each other through their computers, and ‘push browsers’ which allows the seminar leader to control what the participants see on their computer screens. This can be a very effective way to hold discussions, and to show participants information such as that shown in Power Point

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presentations, spread sheets, or other documents.

Advantages:

Webinars are increasingly popular in industry, as they reduce the need for live face-to-face meetings.

They are interactive, and use both audio and visuals

Technology is evolving quickly – better quality, more user-friendly

The Farm Business Management Council has developed webinar technology that is quite effective, even for dial-up users. In a series of 9 pilot webcasts in early 2005, 250 farmers participated and almost all had dial-up connections. Only one person reported problems in receiving the audio signal but this was because they forgot to turn on the dial-up option to cancel the video (which slows down the audio signal on dial-up connections).

Disadvantages

- Presenters must be trained in developing effective materials to use in webinars
- participants often require help getting started
- participants must either have a microphone or headset to speak to the seminar leader, or be a reasonably good typist to use the text chat feature
- dial-up users must use the ‘no video’ option, which leaves only the audio portion of the webinar. ties up the phone in dial-up situations

Email

Email has been used for many years in distance education. Almost everyone with a computer (which is almost everyone) also has email and knows how to use it.

Advantages:

- Can send documents, PDF files, PowerPoint files, to participants in ‘asynchronous time’. The instructor and participants do not have to be on line at the same time
- Can send course materials in advance of a webinar or teleconference
- Inexpensive
- Interactive in ‘asynchronous’ time
- People do not require help using it

Disadvantages

- Less personal medium than audio or audio/visual
- Some users check email infrequently
- Large documents or visuals can take a long time to download

Bridge lines for conference calls

‘Teleclasses’ are an increasingly popular training medium. They are used throughout industry for

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meetings and training courses, and are very effective if the presenter is trained in the use of this medium. Teleclasses can be supplemented with notes or other supporting documents emailed to the participants ahead of time.

Advantages

- People already know how to use the telephone
- Inexpensive: the only cost to the participant is the long distance charges, usually to an American number. Some telephone bridge lines allow the use of toll-free numbers so there is cost to participants
- Interactive. A properly-led teleclass can have a great deal of discussion.

Disadvantages

- Teleclass facilitators must be trained in order to make best use of this medium

Online Forums

Advantages

- Members of the forum can participate at any time.
- Open to all forum members
- Members can share questions, ideas, thoughts, knowledge, experience, challenges, with each other
- Is asynchronous, so does not require all members to be available at a given time
- Although a facilitator, or coordinator, is required, it is only to ensure the forum is working, rather than being required to 'make it work'.

Disadvantages

- Forum participation can be very low, unless the subject matter is of vital interest to most members
- A small number of forum members can end up dominating the discussion, or doing most of the participating
- Is not appealing to slow typists
- Can be prone to misunderstandings in the tone of messages, unless all members are familiar with 'netiquette'

Online Chat

MSN Messenger, ICQ, Yahoo Messenger and others free text chat online.

Advantages

- Free
- Can allow a group of people to 'talk' to each other in text. Can be used in facilitating training at a distance

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Disadvantages

- Participants must be relatively fast typists
- Facilitator must have training and practice in leading online discussions

Online Voice Chat

Services such as *Paltalk* allow online voice conference calls.

Advantages

- Free voice conferencing, with all the advantages of telephone conferencing
- Can include webcam video of participants

Disadvantages

- Participants need microphones and speakers or combination headsets for their computers, and some need to be taught how to set up them up, plus some training may be needed to show participants how to use the voice chat program
- Webcams are not practical for dial-up internet connections

Blackboards, Whiteboards

These are online versions of standard blackboards and whiteboards, which can be used to allow all online participants add comments on the 'board', just as they can in live seminars.

Advantages

- Allows participants to add written comments, and/or drawings during online chat sessions.
- Can be useful for brainstorming during chat sessions

Disadvantages

- Requires some skill in setting up, and some training for the participants to learn how to use it

Podcasting

Podcasting refers to sending audio files over the internet, which can be burned as CDs, or played on the computer or an MP3 player, such as an Apple iPod.

Advantages

- Recordings can be made and emailed or uploaded to a website at any time. Users pick them up when they check their email, or go to the website to download them. Podcasts are like radio programs you listen to when you want to
- Recordings can be creative and interesting, with narration and sound effects.

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- They can be supplemented with documents sent by email
- Inexpensive to distribute
- Can distribute information in a consumable form
- **Disadvantages**
- It requires some training to be able to create podcasts
- Audio files can be quite large, and therefore require quite a bit of time to download through dial-up connections
- People are not yet used to the technology
- If participants want to listen to podcasts while away from their computer, for example in their car, they will need to own an MP3 player, or burn the podcasts to CD.
- Presenters must have some training in order to deliver effective content

Printed Material

Training material sent by mail is still an effective distance education tool.

Advantages

- People are used to it
- Convenient and easy to use
- Can be used to supplement the technologies already mentioned

Disadvantages

- Expensive to produce and distribute, compared to other technologies
- Slow to deliver
- Not interactive
- Not audio/visual, so possibly less engaging

A possible program for rural Alberta

A Rural Leadership Training Program for Alberta would consist of two ‘steps’:

1. a train-the-trainer program to teach people who want to get something going in their area how to inspire others and set up a local program, similar to the Conway County Vision 2020 project. This training would be delivered by the Alberta Community and Cooperative Association (ACCA) which has a long history in design and delivery of rural education and training, including leadership training. The program would be conducted over a 12-month period, and would be delivered using a combination of live one- or two-day training sessions every quarter, plus regular monthly or bi-weekly teleclasses, supported with podcasts, PowerPoints, a website and other training materials as required. Participants and/or their local sponsors would be expected to pay a significant portion of

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the cost of this training, with an equal portion being paid by AAFRD, or other government body. Marketing of this program would be done by ACCA.

2. Support for local 'Vision 2020' projects in communities or larger areas (e.g. counties) around the province. The support for the trained local facilitators would be in the form of mentoring/coaching provided by ACCA trainers using telephone and other distance technology support, as well as periodic in-person consultations. Again the cost of the coaching/mentoring would be shared between the local body and a government program, with the local body managing the funds.

Delivery Agencies

The train-the-trainer program should be designed and delivered by ACCA, which has a long track record in rural training programs.

The local programs could be delivered through existing structures, such as Agricultural Societies, providing members are supportive and interested in the project. Where they are not, a new organization could easily be formed by local people highly energized to take the project on.

It is beyond the scope of this study to describe a detailed program, but the Conway County Vision 2020 case study in the appendix may give a good description of a possible template.

APPENDIX

Some of the people and/or organizations interviewed and/or studied for this project

- Bryan Perkins, participant in the *Alberta LEAD* program designed and delivered by REDA during the 1970s and 1980s
- Archival material from the *Alberta LEAD* program
- Dr. Scott MacLean, principle organizer of the *Canadian Agriculture Lifetime Leadership (CALL)* program funded partially through the Canadian Farm Business Management Council
- David Irvine, corporate executive coach, leadership trainer, author of *Becoming Real: Journey To Authenticity*; and co-author of the bestseller, *Accountability: Getting A Grip On Results*.
- Don Gregorwich, Councillor, County of Camrose
- "Muniversity", created in partnership with the University of Alberta and Alberta Municipal Affairs, designed to "provide senior municipal leaders with the opportunity to further develop the skills required to lead their organizations"
- Anita Lunden, member of a Management Club in Olds that has been meeting regularly for

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- eleven years
- Gail Luce, member of a Management Club that has been meeting regularly in the Ponoka area for twelve years
- Al Bartolcic, Manager of Youth & Community Development, Alberta Community And Cooperative Association
- Somerlee Bennett, Municipal District of Wainwright
- Roxanne Carr, Executive Director, Alberta Association of Agriculture Societies
- Secretary, Strathcona Agriculture Society
- Jo MacDonald, President, Lakedell Agriculture Society
- Susan Meyer, Organization Development Specialist, AAFRD
- Kami Currie and Yvonne Fizer, Sirolli Institute Canada
- Joan Gregorwich, participant and website designer for the *Alberta Rural Women's Online Network* website
- Ann Nachai, NXLevel Canada
- Wild Rose Foundation
- Dan Legault, Executive Director, Ontario Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP)
- Carol Rock, former member of the *Canadian Farm Women Training Council*, co-founder of the *Ontario Farm women=s network*. Founder of *Women and Rural Economic Development*
- University of Brandon, Rural Development Institute. Community Collaboration Project: Empowering Communities and Building Capacity 2005 - 2008
- Rockford center for leadership
- Ed Martsof, co-founder of Conway County Vision 2020
- Milan Wall, Heartland Center
- The MacLean Institute for Community Development, University of Mississippi

Curriculum of Wild Rose Foundation Leadership Institute:

Each module focuses on applying the material discussed to the non-profit environment, including barriers to implementing the concepts. This proposed plan meets the objective of providing relevant, value-added leadership enhancement training for Executive Directors and other leaders within a short-time frame. The participants will end the three-day Institute with knowledge of leadership concepts and the ability to begin to apply them in their own organizations.

- Module 1 – Self-Awareness
 - Goal - to build on strengths and increase empathy.
 - Instruction on leadership characteristics and skills integral to the non-profit sector
 - Will use the Management Styles Questionnaire
 - Video presentation “Servant Leadership”

- Module 2 – Leading and Building Teams

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- Goal - to strengthen the work of the organization through good team leadership
 - Instruction on teams and teamwork as keys to organizational success
 - Teamwork Styles Inventory Questionnaire
 - Video presentation “Giving Leadership Away”
- Module 3 – Communication
 - Goal – to increase awareness of personal communication styles and gain an understanding of other styles.
 - Instruction on communication styles and effective management communication; effective listening
 - Pace Palette Communications Styles Inventory
- Module 4 – Leading Change
 - Goal – to provide tools and insights into surviving and thriving in organizational change
 - Instruction on maintaining productivity through change; transitioning through change; and preparing for change
 - Video presentation “Who Moved My Cheese?”
- Module 5 – Coaching and Mentoring
 - Goal –to be able to use both coaching and mentoring to develop skills throughout the organization
 - Instruction on the advantages of investing in coaching and mentoring; how to decide which to use
 - Workshop practice on coaching
 - Video presentation of “The Helping Hand”
- Module 6 – Succession Planning
 - Goal – creating organizational sustainability through planning and development of potential leaders.
 - Instruction on the framework of sustainability; approaches to succession planning
 - Exercises practicing the concepts of sustainability and succession planning
 - Video presentation of “The Flight of the Buffalo”

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Case Study: Conway County Vision 20-20

Ed Martsof is one of the three co-founders of what became the Conway County Vision 2020 project, in Morrilton, Arkansas.

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This is an interview with Ed Martsolf conducted by Noel McNaughton in Arkansas on September 2, 2005

The Setting:

Ed

This is a story about a small, rural, basically agricultural driven community in central Arkansas. That description I realize could apply to an awful lot of different communities across the mid west and even across the county. Ours is unique in at least one important way in that we are surrounded by two real progressive communities on both our east and west. And so, as a community, we are right now, and have been for the last 10 years or so, a little behind. When our residents look east or west they see a couple of towns that are growing, on the one hand it's growing extremely well because it functions as a bedroom community for a nearby city. But it is a good place to live and has a lot of activity, and many of our residents go there to shop and go there to dinner, and other things like that, so it has the tendency of looking like it is quote/unquote "better".

Both of these are communities that would be bumping right up against a hundred thousand people.

Q: And this is in Conway County?

Ed

Yeah, well, technically no because you'd have to leave the county to go to either of the towns, but they just butt right up against the county so they're not that far away. They're about a 15 minute drive actually.

There's the idea that for some reason both of our neighbouring towns have done pretty well and we have not. So, that's what we inherited about 10 years ago, a real deep seated 'inferiority complex', because we weren't any bigger than we were. Our town has about six thousand people in it and our county has about nineteen thousand, which are almost identical to the numbers of 15 and even 20 years ago. So most people look at those numbers they say 'oh boy, we sure haven't gone anywhere'.

So 10 years ago, basically the feeling would be that we were pretty backward. Decisions were probably made pretty centralized by a small group of fairly powerful, I guess we'd call them leaders, but office holders more likely. And we weren't going anywhere. There was not too much hope.

Three individuals decided to try to improve the situation.

One was a business leader, still owns one of the major small businesses in our community. The other was a professional who had created quite a track record for himself away from Morrilton, and in a much larger arena, and done well enough to 'retire early' and was personally motivated to

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do something for his home town.

He had grown up there and had family there, and his idea was that maybe now for a while he should see what he could give back to the community. And myself, and I'm definitely a transplant in the community. I'm not even from this area originally, and have only been in Conway County for about 12 years, so that makes me an outsider from the word go.

So we three people were inspired by Dr. Vaughn Grisham, who operates an institution connected to the University of Mississippi called the MacLean Institute. There is a book written called the Tupelo Story, and it's about the town in Mississippi called Tupelo.

And it's an amazing, miraculous story over a pretty long period of time and the Mr. MacLean that created this institute owned a newspaper in that town and was one of the first people to bring about major developmental change for the town and for the region.

Dr. Grisham is a rural sociologist with two feet very firmly on the ground and in the community, and is a product of Mississippi and would tell you himself that as he got out of college and began his career, the single largest motivation in his mind was just to get as far away as he could. But, after a while and through certain revelations he did come back and has created, through the MacLean Institute and the continuation of the Tupelo story, one of the real developmental models that we have here in this part of the world.

We heard him make a presentation, invited him to come to the community, and used that as the focus point to draw some people together. That particular meeting did not, wasn't sanctioned by any group or organization and that particular meeting was simply a result of three people calling up people they thought would be interested in doing something for the community. The only thing that we really knew at that point was that, if somebody was going to begin a positive direction for our community, that somebody was going to have to be from right there, in the community.

Community Development

Seventy five people came to our first gathering and in that gathering we got our first orientation to what community development meant, how it works and where it fits into the grand scheme of things. Specifically the concept that if we wanted a better community, a major component of that has got to be the economic condition of our community and that can't be without the economic condition of the citizens. If we wanted economic development, we had to back-up to the preceding step of community development. And that was kind of a new idea for us.

We were definitely in that group of people who thought, let's just get some economic development done. We can buy some space, we can get an industrial park, we can put up a spec building, we can do what we can to entice prospects to town and we'll get some industries, probably manufacturing cause most of our people are off the farm and have manual skills and not

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too many others. So, we'll get some economic development, we'll get some jobs, and, other things will come around.

That represents the single largest change then in the thinking of our little group of three. Then that grew to a group of six and then that grew on out to a much larger, critical mass that began to understand in agreement with the Dr. Grisham, that the number one principle is that if you want economic development, you need to begin the process by taking positive, aggressive steps in community development.

So that leaves you with the great mystery: what's community development anyway? That is not so easy to define or to describe because that's a whole series of functions and activities that basically go all the way back to the individual level and that, if you wish to change the organization, if you wish to change the community, the first thing that has to change will be the individual. And, believe me that wasn't necessarily a popular idea. You know, most folks, it seemed like, had a lot of ideas on how something or somebody else should change, but what do you mean I'm supposed to change? You know that's not a, that's not exactly what most folks want to hear.

So, the way that we went about it, in our community, we had also run across survey done by a major newspaper company, that we used to kind of get our grip. Because when we first met, we were determined to move forward, but where in the world do you take a first step?

The newspaper had surveyed, about 150 of the top communities across the land, trying to find what common denominators in those communities. They found three common elements in these communities that had risen to the top. One was that those communities had some form of education post high school. It didn't define what that was, just that there was something to reach for after high school, in the community.

The second thing was that these communities all had a newspaper. Even if it was a weekly, and that's what ours was, they did have a newspaper, or newsletter or something that citizens could get their hands on and read.

And the third thing, and this is actually, was actually the kicker then for our decision, these top communities each had some kind of leadership training program.

Lifelong Learning

That meant we knew we needed to create some kind of educational program. It wouldn't be education by any definition that we had experience with. We also knew that we should probably just throw out the word education since it had all that baggage and so we basically did sort of shift over to the idea of *lifelong learning*. We knew we needed to create some kind of school. Even if the school wasn't going to have chairs and seats and desks and walls and things like that,

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it would be a time and a place where some people could get together and they would all come out at the other end of that school better equipped to deal with these very fuzzy issues.

So we created a thing we called the **training institute**. And we were the students of the first class, so we built the class and were the students of the very first training institute class.

We didn't want to use the word 'leadership' either, because of all the baggage it carries. The very clear single motivation for that class of people coming together was *citizen involvement*. Our goal was to make it so that any one entering that class would gain the skills and see the impact of getting personally involved and even be able to take the organization that they're a member of or even leading, and put it into a positive direction that had an ultimate benefit of bringing our community to a higher level.

We wanted to find as many normal, regular, everyday people as we could, who had the character and the attributes and the personalities and the motivation, to better themselves and better their organization or group, and to better the community.

And we were looking for colleagues, other people that they could have as support and that they could provide support for, to become a little larger critical mass instead of just one person out there by themselves. And learn some skills then that would allow them to go back into the community and make a difference.

We are now forming class nine. One of these classes has done a two year program, another of the classes went a year and a half, so we're basically forming today class nine, and we've been at this for right at 10 years.

It does have a name now. We went through a lot of years without even a name. And we do call it Conway County Vision 20/20. It is a non-profit organization. It is not a 501 C3. We have a very very small group in the membership group paying a completely nominal membership fee of 20 dollars a year for a member.

But the whole thing is just a movement, it's a movement of people and it's never ever, not from the beginning and never once has it crossed the line of drawing attention to its self. It's tried to only ever take a catalyst position to get something done.

We've never aligned ourselves with any organization or group. We're supported by almost every group and organization in the community. We've not ever taken any kind of public funding, but we do accept any kind of support from any business or anybody that has a stake or an interest in the community. We are completely open, completely democratic and we are made up of the very stakeholders that we're working for. And that is the people who are involved in the community already, either as part of the education system, the social network, the medical community, and of course very strongly influenced by the business community.

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The Training Institute

There's a different attitude in the shops and in the businesses, and there's definite different attitude on the part of those folks who are in leadership positions and in those groups of organizations that have that responsibility. It's not a whole lot different than a huge ship in the ocean. To get that ship to take a 180 degree turn, is not easy or fast, and you cannot get a ship to turn that's sitting still.

We did have to get a little bit of forward motion in place before we were able to begin that turn. I don't know if we're all the way 180 degrees around yet, probably not, but it certainly is in a much different position than it was 10 years ago, and even though the results are manifested by a beautiful downtown, completely renovated, many more businesses on the main street, a lot of things have happened in the political arena.

There are the Conway County Christian Clinic, Conway County Care Centre, Conway County wellness centre where people can go. There's at least four of these organizations, and the seeds for these changes and improvements to the community in every single one of these cases have come from those people that have gone through these classes. So it has met its objective of getting those citizen's involved and it has been able to function as a non-partisan, non-political, completely independent catalyst.

So in that first group we weren't even sure what community development meant yet, but we knew that we had to educate ourselves and so we just organized ourselves in a way that we thought made sense, to conduct a training institute. We had some good people from the education world and we had business people and we had folks that worked for companies and so on, on this development group, so, we had good inputs all the way around.

Recruitment

We formed four committees to operate the training institute. We had a committee of people who felt like they could go out through the community. They had the connections to be able to talk to folks who were in a position to know, the potential leaders, the current leaders. And so they became the Recruitment Committee. It was their job to introduce this idea to all the various little neighbourhoods and communities around the county, and to find the possible members of the next class, carefully analyze who would be coming into the class, what would they be bringing to the table, what possible impact could they create? What attributes have they demonstrated already?

The key to operating a Recruitment Committee was that we were not looking for representatives. We were looking for individuals. We were not saying B well, here's organization A, B and C, and so we better get somebody in here from A, B and C to stalk up the class. We were looking

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for people. People that were internally motivated those who were probably to some extent, their own thinkers, to a large extent, but those who had the potential to take what they would learn and do something with it.

We also had a **financial committee**, which was headed up by one of the people that is extremely well trusted in the community. And he was the kind of person who goes out into the business community primarily and says we've got a worthwhile project going on. This has a long term benefit back to the community and we need people who are oriented to re-investing back into their community and so, you know, how about writing me a cheque for a thousand or five thousand, or some kind of a donation. And so that fund raising conducted by the finance committee created a first budget. We didn't want to let the students clear off the hook, so we did put a tuition to the class and so each student coming in does pay a one hundred dollar fee for tuition. And you can imagine, some of these, that's a pretty big bill. But for most folks that would be candidates for a group like this, they, they would recognize it too pretty early on as being nominal.

You would also immediately recognize that you can't run a class for 25 to 30 and that was our target number, for a whole year on a budget that's generated by one hundred dollar tuition's. **So basically, we figured that the cost of doing this class was more in the neighbourhood of five to seven hundred dollars per student, and that meant that the local investment from the community would be at least 5 to 1, probably in many cases 6 to 7 to 10, matching the student.** That gave the automatic psychological advantage then to the idea that you're making an investment and you're coming in here to spend a day out of every month. And that was our regiment, we wouldYthe regiment that we set up was that people would meet for a full day. We would have a little retreat at the beginning and a little retreat at the end so there was little, little extra time there. But basically the time commitment was one full day on a monthly basis and we were rigid about that. You know there were only a certain number of misses that would be acceptable if a person was hoping to be a graduate of this program.

So then that took care of our financial needs for the moment and we basically ran a class of roughly 20, 25 students, basically for a nine month period of time, even though there were variations through that. And basically for about a 20 thousand dollar figure per year. That gave us a little bit of money for outside expertise, but we still took the challenge to keep things balanced. We would always match up an outside resource with a local one. In that way then we would add credibility to the local one but at the same time then we knew that we had somebody we could keep the conversation going with, even after our hired expert went home.

The third organizational group that we formed then was one that we just called **logistics**. We, it turned out to be kind of a catch-all for operating this training institute and just about everything else. And it would be possible to look back on that and say B well this is the cookies and punch group, and it sure was. They did a great job of feeding us but those of you that have worked with any kind of an educational enterprise, know that there's a million details that

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somebody that's got that kind of a mind, needs to give in order for these to operate in an efficient and in an organized and orderly way. We got to the point where we were taking field trips and other things like that, so that could even include transportation and speakers coming to town and sometimes lodging, and it was a serious and important piece of work, and you couldn't operate without them.

The **fourth group**, and the final group then we called the **curriculum committee**. It was their job to develop substance. I mentioned earlier that we had people from all walks of life there, and the good starting point for us was to ask them B what were the top experiences that they had had? Many of them came out of corporations or came from organizational groups that had made efforts at some sort of development and training for their workers and so we ended up having a wealth of information to work through that was basically borrowed from any number of businesses and organizations throughout the state and throughout the country.

We wanted a half and half program, realizing that these people were coming off the street. There were people that were in leadership roles already but the majority of that class are people who are strong individuals and they probably have a great deal of respect in their groups and their neighbourhoods and in their closed in circles. But they are not necessarily holding some kind of a positional leadership role.

So, the first thing to remember here is that these are people who are currently running a fairly normal life and as they step off the street and into this class, they become prepared to move into the organizations in the town and become effective leaders in them. That may mean just going back to their own church. Or it may mean just going back to their company. But it probably means that they would see a way where they could get on the city council, where they could get on the corn board, or they could get on the school board, or where they could actually become part of the area Chamber of Commerce, or, when it came to the economic development side of it, our economic development arm was a group of businessmen that had organized themselves for the purpose of generating job, and their name was Conway County Economic Development Corporation. They owned the land, they did the industrial park developments, they would recruit prospects, build spec buildings, and other things of that nature. They also became, over time, one of the major supporters of the 20/20 program.

The Curriculum

So now we're organized to conduct the class and we became the class, the very first one, and that gave us an instant feedback on how things were going. We brought in some outside resources. We went to look at other communities and we basically kept our regimen of developing personal skills, communication, arbitration, and negotiation. Many of the things just would show up on a list on how to conduct an effective meeting, what are the skills you need to hold your own in a large group through parliamentary procedure, and just generally to gain confidence and to become brave enough to be an active participant in whatever kind of a group you find yourself in.

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Q: What would be an example of some of the outsiders you brought in and what they taught, and an example of your local people and what they taught?

Ed

One of my most favourites is an industrial psychologist. And he's considered to be one of the best in his field. He's written some books about team work and he knows how to take a group of people and make them understand through his real life simulation activities, what a team is and how it works and how you get from zero to an effective, efficient, functioning team. So, he would come in on a regular basis and work with us on things like that. We would also have folks coming in from the outside that knew how to do the personality analysis and make it so that folks were better equipped to know what sorts of reactions to expect from people who have a little different make-up than their own. We learned how to negotiate. We learned how to deal with conflict. We learned about diversity. And from year to year the outside resource people would change. Some folks would come into the general community, some would leave, and you'd replace them with another.

We had the great benefit of having somebody connected to the university extension service that would come in and had particular expertise on a development of a meeting, how to get the people set up to where they were in a position to make that meeting function and to get their desired results in a reasonable amount of time. We had specific people who had maybe a national experience. One man was a minority that had excelled in his own career and he led us through some learning practices related to diversity in the workplace. We brought in people who have had a good track record and a good experience with let's say something like workforce development or now a key issue would be E-commerce for example. And then we would always, if we put them on the schedule in the morning, we'd try to get a local counterpart on the agenda in the afternoon so, one real interesting thing is the football coach. The local high school level football coach that had a lot of experience in being able to analyze the various personalities to create a learning situation where people would actually get to practice how to interact, how to take a conflict situation and turn it positive and just the basic dynamics of a group gathering and what you can do and how you can expect yourself to respond in that kind of a situation. Another local person that's had specific training and arbitration and would come in and run the group through some experiences, and would help them understand how, well, one of the real important things there was that arbitration was available to people in the community locally. And that there are a few skills that they could adopt just in their everyday life.

We have one man that would come in locally, that had a real good grip on the history of the community itself and a very interesting way of telling it, and basically from a family perspective, and that would always leave us with insights a vast majority, like 95 percent of the class, had never heard of before, even though they had lived right here and lived through a lot of that sort of thing.

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Volunteers

One of the real important points to understand here is that this thing is an independent, locally funded initiative and the only way that something like that's going to operate, is if it has a really strong and almost, and in our case for almost it's whole history, entirely volunteer tire base. The people doing their work. Except for these hired folks that we brought in as resource folks, the people all work for nothing. And so in this world of volunteers, the basic lesson that we learn, and it had a lot to do with the recruitment of people for a class, is that folks naturally. Maybe a better way of saying it is that there's a small number of folks out there that are naturally going to volunteer to work, but that if you ask volunteers what started them on their career of volunteerism, they're almost always going to say that so and so asked me. They were invited. Some one came to them and opened the door and created an invitation. And so that is one of the principles here that we started very small and our growth has been directly related to a small group of people becoming larger because folks were specifically approached, invited and encouraged to become part of the effort, accepted the invitation, got involved and inspired, and did that again for another. So even a recruit into the class, almost always will have been recommended by a friend or associate or somebody in their business to their recruitment committee.

Q: Now these classes, the participants in the classes, has the training institute or the classes evolved to where it has a bit of cache in the community and people are kind of wanting to get in now?

Ed

Generally more people apply for the next class than there are spots in the class. But I don't think it would be a good idea to underrate the need for our recruitment committee to stay fresh and active, because there are some social dynamics at work here. And, if you have too many applicants you probably better ask why and who they are or why they're applying, because after you do reach a certain maturity, and after you have created a certain track record, there are going to be applicants that are doing this for their own benefit. They want that on their resume. And that's really not what you're looking for. You're looking for somebody that's got the, a natural inclination to do for others before they do for themselves. And, so, after you reach a certain point it seems to me that an effort like this could start attracting the wrong kind of people. And, there's been some books written actually about if want your group or your community to go in the right direction, and I realize how this must sound, you better have the right people on the bus. And sometimes the first step that you need to take is to unload the wrong people. Off the bus. So that recruitment committee needs to stay active. It's the body that knows the purpose. They know what kind of people they're looking for and what sorts of things they, that needs to happen. So, I don't think you could ever reach a point where, where you would just take in folks because they thought it was a nice idea. And so yes, we have more applicants than we have spots now, but we still, as a recruitment group, go out fresh each year as if we didn't have any applicants.

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We look again, and of course we get a lot of recommendations from businesses and organizations. People now are more inclined to make recommendations because they know somebody that's been through the program, or they were through it themselves and they see my friend Bob or Anne, and they say B well you know, this is what it did for me and this is what it could do for you. Why don't you try it out. And they'll be the recruiter.

Q: How many people have gone through the program so far?

Ed

Well this is class nine forming now, and, I don't really know the answer to that question. But it's ah, you could take 9x25 and you'd have it.

Q: It sounds to me like it's pushing 200 people in a town of 6000 and a county of 19,000 B are you going to run out of potential leaders or the need for them?

Ed

Vaughn Grisham says that we don't even, we haven't even started our work, that we can get a good start if we've connected to 19,000 people.

Q: That's your entire county.

Ed

Every single person. If your effort is not connected to every single person, you don't have a legitimate effort. So I think we've got a ways to go yet. We are not connected to 19,000 people. We don't expect to run out of work for a very long time or run out of leaders because it's real interesting how these leaders evolve, where they come from and if our goal is that we connect, whatever connect means, to 19,000 people, we're going to find leaders (and we are already), finding leaders that no one would have ever guessed would have the potential to be a leader. People who are thrust into positions. And you know that already. You know from crisis situations or wartime stressors or natural disasters, that they'll be people stepping up to the plate that you would have never bet on that. And the same thing applies on a much slower, softer scale, just in general. When there's a time and a place for a particular individual to apply their interest and their ability to help the others, most of the time that's the way it will work out. But there has to be some stage set that they can step on to. And I think that's our job, is to figure out how to set the stage so that any or all of those people that have any kind of leadership strength in them, get a place to perform. And the assumption here is that almost all of these have some leadership potentials and almost all the communities go through their entire life never even touching that streak. Many people you know, would have the ability to sing or to do music, but

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they just never had the opportunity and by the time they're 40 or 50 years old, they and everybody else is convinced that they can't sing.

Q: Talk a little bit now about the effect of this training program. What you're seeing in Morrilton and in Conway County as a result of this 10 years of training, or of the program running.

Ed

When you look at nuts and bolts, concrete and boards and buildings and all that, you can see things like an old hospital that stood on the hill. It stood there for, oh, I don't know, 25 years vacant, empty, ugly. Completely inhabited today. Nice apartments. It didn't hurt the old structure at all. It has all the class of a historic building. All the luxury of a wonderful place to live and the kind of thinking that went into the development of that old hospital, is exactly what it's a perfect emblem and it does, it sits up on top the hill and, it's a perfect emblem of exactly what we're looking for. It was developed - several million dollars were put into that building to make it a beautiful apartment building and in those that money came from investment capital. And the investment capital was solicited through a non-profit organization that contracts for people who don't have enough money. So, a lot of those apartments are inhabited by people who are low income. But they're nice apartments. And it could even be a student that doesn't have an adequate income and gets into one of these types of apartments. In that same, in that same building (cell phone), they have regular apartments. I mean they're all the same. They're all very nice and if I wanted to go over there with a good salary and I wanted a place to live in town, it would be just right. So they've mixed two or three pretty important things in terms of our housing situation in our town, and made it work. And make it again a positive story.

I mentioned earlier a wellness centre, a clinic that's available for people who fall through the health insurance cracks. They don't make enough money or they're not hooked to a company that has a good health plan. They make a little too much money to get caught in the Medicare program. There's a clinic there that's funded by local churches and local contributions and its staffed by the doctors, the very same doctors that are in the hospital come over to this clinic and operate it. And it has a steady stream of people who use it and it's a major plus for a whole segment of our population. There have been, I think mentioned earlier, a various number of political forums that have taken place and pretty much I would say that every single club, civic group, political organization, has, can and does trace back now over the 10 years, to some fundamental change in the way that they do business because a 20/20 alumni came on to that Board or led the organization.

Q: *What about businesses?*

Ed

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There's been a shift there. Ten years ago we had 2000, what you'd call industrial jobs, that were part of three major companies. One of those companies, it's headquarters in Greenbay, Michigan. And it does paper products with the lumber resource around our area. A second one rebuild automotive parts and a third one was, created, build blue-jeans, or Levi Strauss. And, so we had that typical, low skilled, manufacturing industrial things. There were a few small businesses around too. There were local entrepreneurs and there were other small businesses that had come to town, so there was a smattering of what you would call small business and then one of the other things I think to keep in mind here is, that in this part of the world. The people, there's a culture amongst the people to not put all their eggs in one basket. So, many, many people would have a job all right, but they would also have some property and there would be some cattle on that land. There might be some pigs or could be some growing enterprise B there were some times when they're growing enterprise. And then there would be, you know, something else going on. Almost never did you see somebody just signing up to work for a particular company and that's that. So there were a lot of seeds of entrepreneur and I mentioned earlier that three quarters of this county is still agricultural in nature.

So then, 1999, we'd been operating for a couple of years at that time and early 1999, two of those three businesses closed within a week of each other. So of the 2000 jobs, right at, I think it was 1200, disappeared in a two week period. That kind of a blow is a fairly major blow to a little town like that and this had happened to us once before 15 years earlier, when a plastics plant closed up. It also took out a major employment base and even when we came into the picture 10 years ago, the town was still basically licking its wounds from that closure 15 years before. And the response that the community made in 1999 was a 180 degrees difference, when the earlier industry closed, the town was pretty sure that it was dead. When this happened in 1999, there had already been a small group of business leaders that had gone through a scenario that was developed where they would think through the effects of just this sort of thing.

Q: *This is part of one of the training classes?*

Preparing Scenarios

Ed

Yes, that's correct. And so there actually was a small cadre of people who had 'experienced' this in their thinking and in their imagination, before it actually happened. And, the response is B this is tough, but we already know that we have to look to ourselves for the future of this community anyway. And we already know that in all three of these cases, the decision-making for the employment of the people who are in those plants, is not local. In the one case, it's way up there in Michigan. In another case, clear out there in California, and in another case, I forgot the state but it was Massachusetts, well it was Massachusetts, I do remember. And so, that much is easy for almost anybody to understand that the main office some place far way made a decision and tough luck for you. But it's not quite so easy to comprehend the idea that there's a

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proportion of the wealth that's been generated by the work of the local person and many cases local resources, that also is going to be exported out of your community. And we didn't try to explain that, except maybe in a concentrated class and there would be a pretty small number of folks that would take their thinking that far. But they could see the benefit of a smaller, a little more autonomous or independent, the local owner, decision maker, and a ply he back into the community of resources. And so basically what happened is, its small business enterprises jumped up where they hadn't been before, and the ones that already were there, got stronger and, and we now, and we did bring in a couple of businesses on the rebound, so we replaced some of the jobs and all of those replacements required retraining of people and many people who were at one point sitting there at a sewing machine, are now sitting at a computer. And in a recent interview, a vast majority of them felt like the retraining that they had to go through, not only improved their employment, but also improved their general quality of life as well.

Q: What would be some of the businesses that replaced, some examples of you mention two, what are they?

Ed

The two main ones was a manufacturing company that came in and occupied one of the vacant buildings and makes a specialty product, the round speakers. So if you were to go to a rock concert and you were to see all of that amplification equipment coming in there, much of that would be built in that plant, right now. They work for the music industry primarily. I think there's right at 200 jobs out there and those are skilled labour but a little higher skilled. And they do make a wooden product for sound systems. The second business is really quite an interesting story because this whole company was located in Missouri. Family owned and they had a specialty that required people that knew how to work with metal and they create systems that filter and prepare air for office buildings, hospitals, so on. It's a set of machines and machinery, and ductwork that manages the air for these closed environments and they expanded to Morristown in one of our spec buildings actually. To build these products and then a few months later, they moved their whole operation. So they ended up coming in and building another whole big factory building of their own. And again, it's a pretty specialized and kind of an up-to-date need of businesses and organizations have discovered in recent years and they need to have their air treated that they're going to be blowing around for the employees to breathe. That's the second one. It's a high paying job in this case too, but higher skilled too, requiring more training.

And then the third one is what you would call a 'Call Centre' that is contracted to the banking industry. So that all these times that you would make an inquiry mainly for a mortgage, that those mortgage inquiries would be referred to the staff of people sitting in a room, in a big building in a room. In this case it's, I believe it's 400 people, sitting at their desks at a computer, taking calls from inquiries about various lending options. And, so that Call Centre would be contracted to a number of institutions, the banking institution primarily.

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Linking Businesses to Schools

Ed

I think moving on from the developments related to the replacement of jobs, which obviously then did require some re-training of the work force, we should also be sure and mention some of this recovery so to speak, was, came about through the development of these small businesses that were already in place, providing as much encouragement as possible for them to be in an atmosphere that would encourage them to grow with the smaller, probably even call them higher quality jobs. These would be local owners. These would be people that would be reinvesting into the community. And over this time, the community has gotten a reputation for a very high level of generosity on the part of business, in terms of donations and reinvestments back into the community development process. This can be general donations like you usually see in a community. But it also can be fairly innovative and creative, specific targeted, put the money up in order to create a specific program. We have a program that links business to the schools by placing teachers out into the various work places and communicating with the students in such a way that they are rewarded for achievement, and that if they become an Arkansas scholar, for example, they get a sticker that goes on their high school diploma. And we've gotten a fairly large number of the employers in the community to honour that as a preferred applicant when it's time for them to apply for a job.

Q: So the teacher goes out into the businesses, learns the business, teaches the kids about it?

Ed

The purpose in putting a teacher into the business so that their awareness can be raised on the kinds of skills that are necessary for students to have. The point is that there's always been a gap between the education system and the business world, and most of the educators are a little bit short on their understanding of those two primary principles we mentioned earlier in the conversation, that it doesn't matter so much about the student's specific individual personal skill level, as much as it matters about their attitude towards learning. Can they learn, and are they willing to learn, and when a teacher actually experiences life in the workplace, they're better prepared to go back and help prepare the students then for those kinds of skills. Put the emphasis where it's always been certainly, in technical information, but not just to send the kid out the end of the day with only those technical skills. A lot of these are personal characteristics that do need to be nurtured and developed and maybe in history, there were more opportunities in the home for a young person to learn work ethic and to learn about responsibility and how to work with other people. Or just how to work, period. And these seem to be the areas that are causing the largest amount of problems for the employers. And so, they've tried to create a situation where the teachers, the ones most closest to the student, can see this for themselves, communicate directly with the owners of business and then be better prepared, not to go back and teach them to work in a specific business, but to be a more attractive applicant to any

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employer. A lot of folks go and approach the workforce with that attitude of yeah, I want a job, and completely miss the point that that employer is looking to buy a certain set of skills. And if those skills don't exist, that person is not that valuable. And there's an awful lot of young people that approach the workplace and they don't understand that.

Q: *You mention so there's the teachers B what's another example of that?*

Ed

And then on that same program, and it's called the Arkansas Scholar Program, the student gets rewarded for achievement in school. And these achievements are actually again targeted at what you would call personal habits that will then allow the employer to know that if they've got that little certificate on there, this person does have a track record of doing what they say they'll do. Keeping their commitment, being on time. Putting in a full day. They don't have to be an A or a B student. I forget what the level is that academically allows them to still qualify. But they do have to, they don't get that certificate, or that sticker on their certificate, unless they've been reliable and responsible and they, I suppose another old term that would be used for that is just a, good citizenship. So this is an effort then to reward students that have developed these abilities, but, to also allow employers to know that they don't have to figure this all out for themselves, after their starting to pay them. So again, it's a full loop that comes back to their, you know, folks are in school anyway and that there is a reward at the end of the day for those that are trying. Are making that effort.

The other side benefit of course is that a lot of these students that now have this little sticker, that gives them preferential treatment for employment in the local businesses, would otherwise have left town.

Y.community like other most communities, has the single largest exporters are brain power over kids.

Q: *Are you finding that more kids are staying there then?*

Ed

Well, our statistics still would say that things are pretty level. I don't think that we can point to any number and say it's, bigger, you know, than it was. But, again, a level number, you know I our situation, probably does represent progress. Because, I think most of our counterparts, that number would be a declining number and a fairly sharp decline at that.

Q: *Okay. You mention a couple of other things that you're encouraging for the small businesses, a couple of other approaches.*

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Ed

Yeah, where, you know an economic body and/or chamber would have packages of incentives that are, that they're prepared to offer to a business or a company that's coming to town, they, our community has recognized the value of an established, locally operated business, and has taken some fairly aggressive steps in making it possible for those business to not just stay, but to grow, and to want to be situated in our community. And as a result, many of those mid sized, what I'd call high quality jobs, businesses have grown and more jobs are created. Two or three that I can think of immediately have added employees steadily over recent years. Another initiative along that same line is to do everything possible, again by way of attraction and incentive, to draw that same kind of entrepreneur to town. The atmosphere of being favorable for small business is kind of the reputation that we want, and the motivating goal there is that we're probably further ahead, to have five companies that are employing 20 people each, than we are to have one company that is employing a hundred people.

Q: *Some examples?*

Ed

Well, Levi-Strauss, for example, did have hundreds of people and so did the Arrow Automotive. And those were, they were pretty good jobs but they were also very manual, hand jobs. Sewing machines and rebuilding parts in the other case. Both of them went down for pretty predictable reasons. One would be business going offshore and a second one would be having an ever increasing efficiency and an ever shrinking market. So they got better, better and better at this small number of things that they could do and then the companies coming along that were more flexible, bumped them out. So, those are pretty conventional and pretty common reasons for a big company to go down now. And so what we are probably seeing is a mark of the future, would be a business, of about 100 to 120 people, and it would takes a local product, pork, and creates a high quality, specialty market around him and her, well around pork products, so it's a trademark for our community to have Pettijean hams, known all over the state as coming out of our community. There's another small business that takes wood products and again it's maybe only 30 employees there, but they're long term employees, highly paid, highly skilled people that create a very high product sound system, sold all around the world. And the third example is creative local resource thing where the company uses catnip of all things, pressed into a cardboard carrier box and with a nice wrapper around it, to produce a product that calls a scratching pad for cats. And it's one of the probably three major producers of such a product in the United States.

As you look at these various business, I guess we'd call it enterprise development B one of the levels that you can't ignore is what's going on up and down every country road and every street. There's always somebody tinkering around with an idea and one of the benefits that we've had in this is that there have been a few of these ideas that have turned into real business and people still know the history of when that idea was only in somebody's garage. And that Soundcraft

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that was mentioned a little bit earlier is a perfect example of that. That began in a man's garage and just grew and grew to where it was a multi-million dollar business. So attractive as a matter of fact, that the original owners have just recently sold it to the employees. They've banded together and own that business now.

But, there's any number, there's just a general atmosphere of, of nurture for somebody that I guess you would call 'entrepreneurial'. And, there's a general encouragement along those lines and so you'll see a lady, out there in the country, thinking about, that you know, had one of the most beautiful flower gardens that you could ever imagine. People would just, you know, that was her hobby and everybody knew Mrs. Penner had these good, all these beautiful flowers and beautiful flower garden. But now, she's actually the supplier of several of these flower shops. She's not just a gardener any more, she's getting an income from that particular hobby.

We had another person there that rented an old building in town and created a step work of people, artisans and craft folks that could bring their stuff to town and they'd have a booth. She would, this lady would then serve as the market centre for, there must have been 30 different artisans and crafts people from out in the country that were using that as their 'in town outlet'. And, they, some would make it, some would not. But the fact that that was going on, changed that particular street in town from a street that you could get a parking place on at any hour, of any day, to a street that I don't think you can find a parking place on most any hour of any day now.

There's been the start up of two restaurants on the main street, definitely an encouragement that this town would not only benefit from their inclusion into the circle but to support them. And people do. They make a conscious effort to support those businesses because of where they are located.

So you have the whole spectrum. You have those brave souls that are willing to go ahead and give it a whirl when they may have not otherwise because there's a general feeling of support. And you know, a lot of times, it doesn't actually involve money. It's a matter of a network of people who will provide that timely advice, or give that direction, you know it could be a lawyer, it could be an accountant, it could be somebody in the insurance business. But they can go to, let's say the Chamber office and they can ask B who should I see and they'll lead them to the right kind of person that will help that particular specialty area. So a lot of this work doesn't involve hard cash, but it sure converts to a much better business position for that person who's trying to get his business up and going or, make it grow.

Q: What would be an example, I mean that was one example. What's another example of a specific, I don't know, policy, action, that the county or the town would have taken to encourage a small business, either to come in or a small business that's already there to grow and stay? I mean, are we looking at tax breaks, all the typical stuff?

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Ed

Actually, no. This is one thing we're still working on, is the idea of how to get, and this is in the works, how to get an organization pull together, where a group of small businesses could in fact have a tax incentive or some other normal economic development package applied to them as a group. I think that probably the best example that I can use to answer that question, because, I think you're probably already seeing that a lot of this might actually be called moral support, or just the same sort of support that comes from a support group. It's a connection, it's a contact. It's going to the right people. But I'll give you two examples that I think may be a little more concrete answers to your question.

The Chamber has developed a Health Insurance Program. That is a specific, they have negotiated, they've identified and then negotiated a program for small businesses to participate in and the business can have only one employee but still get the benefit of being part of a health insurance package. And, that's a big deal. So that's been coordinated through the Chamber Office and we're seeing an increasing number of people from that.

A second example, cause that's pretty bureaucratic, or institutional if you will, and quite a bit of what goes on around that community now is not that way. You know, they're, they're not looking to an organization or institution to help them out. What they're doing is, again, we've emphasized the idea of a network of people that can be helpful and useful. And I guess one of my most favourite examples then would be one of the business leaders, been in the town for YI'll say 15 years. Has a very lucrative business and has taken under his wing, at least six start-ups. And these then, and he functions as an ongoing mentor for these start-ups. And I guess a couple of them are not actually start-ups, they've already been started and they're trying to get to be a more viable business. And, his personal mentoring relationship with those people has made a huge difference in their success and that even includes taking money out of his own pocket. That's a pretty powerful confidence builder and it's now showering with money, but it may be in one case that I'm very familiar with B this particular business was about to conduct a market survey and that market survey would cost a pretty good bundle of money. So he just partnered up with the business during this market survey and ran, on this particular marketing method, ran one of his products that would be comparable to the new company on that market, on that market test. And he had some predictable expectation of how that product would do, out on the open market. And they used that as their baseline. And then this new product company put a product on that exact same market. And the mentor paid for the whole thing. So they were off and running. They knew whether they had a product that the market would respond to, and they had learned that in the real world, under daily guidance, and, in this particular case anyway, completely supported by this neighbour. Neighbour helping neighbour.

Financing

Q: All right, you've touched on it already, financing B almost every small business needs some

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sort of financing. They can't always get it from the bank. Is there is any group of businesses or any source for, I guess what we would call 'angel capital'?

Ed

No. We are not that advanced yet. That would be a really nice addition to YI know there are a lot of people that would, and are, working towards that but it does not exist at this point. Not in a form that would be readily available to anybody that needed it. I'm sure there's no end to personal connections in and around the community that works that way. I know that's a fact, but it's not an institutionalized thing. It's not a readily available thing. It's just strictly a tie to personal connections. But, having said that, we do have a local bank. And we have a local bank that has grown out of our Vision 20/20 program. And by that I just mean that the person who made this happen, was a student and a leader of the program and does, has, does declare in public forums that the experiences that he had in this program led him to make the decision to create a community bank. That community bank is owned by community investors and is very community friendly. So, people who would be in this position you're talking about, can walk into that bank and it's still a bank. And they still have to go through the normal procedures, but it's an altogether different atmosphere from what you would call normal in the banking world today.

Sustaining the Program

The two main problem areas that I can see, looking back over a decade. I called the number one area related to energy. It takes a lot of energy to make this sort of thing go. And that energy has got to come from somebody, that energy's got to come from people. And especially as you're looking at things coming out of a completely volunteer organization, there are certain cycles in volunteerism that are pretty true. Nature cycles. And, I've read and heard that there's basically a seven year cycle where people basically burnout over a seven year period. You'll have then the effect of that in your community, where there's a high performance and then you have kind of a drop off and it goes down to a certain point, and then you'll see another surge and another basically, seven year cycle. I think that's probably pretty true and any initiative is going to have a certain challenge transitioning from its first generation to its second generation of leaders. So, another way of saying that is, we have had to go through now, the transition from the founding group of people to the next group of leaders, even in this Vision 20/20 program and we did suffer a loss of energy, in making that transition. We had people that had done their time, so to speak, and were ready to go on to other things. They backed up from this particular piece of work somewhat. They always seemed to be there to call on but their daily, or weekly or ongoing investment decreased. Of course other people were coming on at that same time, and their energy was always increasing, but, there was a net loss. We're probably about to make another transition not too far in the future, in what you'd call the third generation of leaders for this activity, this initiative. And we're trying to take a few steps right now to try to not have that same dip in the energy. And once again, even though I think we've broadened the circle significantly in citizen involvement, what we set out to do in the first place, we still have not

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solved the need for a larger energy pool. We have more people willing to work but we still have a too small energy generator group, initiators. And so we are taking some steps to try to correct that by having a second year program option on our training institute. So we've carried people through the first year now. They get their skills. They learn about community development and the dynamics of a functioning healthy community and then in the second year, they are kept together as a group, to practice that. Not to just hear about it, but to put it into action. So, year one's kind of theory and year two is kind of a practicum. And it's still to be seen how that will play out, because we've only done it once so far. But the result of this first second year program has been pretty exciting. And the things that happened as a result of that second year group, have been first time ever events. They are very definitely poised to move the community quite a lot forward, from where it is now.

Q: What's an example?

Ed

It's a Conference. We have a Conference scheduled in October, 2005. The budget runs right out about 60,000 dollars and it's State wide, and it is also targeted for regional. We would expect people from out of state. We even had an inquiry yesterday from Oregon and I feel like we could very well push our community high enough to gain some national attention. So for a group of volunteers again, people to bite off something like that, just organizing a conference, is a pretty good job, and, never been done before. We've gone to lots of conferences but we've never 'been' the conference before. So that would have been enough of an undertaking as it is. But, to go for the quality of a conference that this group did, and it looks like we're going to pull it off. Fifty days to go, basically in terms of money management, we've got it broken even with fifty days left to go, so, everything that we sell and develop and collect now, will be on the plus side.

A second fairly major shortcoming that we have not addressed, is what I would title ABarriers@. Most people think of it strictly in a racism point of view, where it's just a color thing. But it's not now. The racism is just one of the symptoms I believe, in a whole series of barriers that this type of work is going to have to overcome. We've made progress. We have one or two members in each class that are coming out of the minority groups but we still have minority groups in the community B they're not represented at all. And ah, we've done our best to try to alleviate that barrier and we have made some progress that way. But, we still have a lot of work to do.

Another barrier, that is even more effective in our community, would be the barrier between town and country. And, you know, our town folk and our country folk are different from each other and they feel those differences both ways. And, perhaps, the country folk feel it a little more emotionally than the city folk, but it does create a tension, it does create a divide. And we have also addressed that and we do have some increasing participation coming in from the countryside and the group and the organization and the training institute, very frequently moves its location out into the countryside. So that particular barrier is making some progress. You have barriers between the male and the female. You have barriers between the old and the young. We have at

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least five high school students in every class and we've also made an effort to bring in, not just retired folks, but people who have been retired for a good long time and have them being, having an ongoing role in each class. So, the whole issue of barriers, of all kinds, is going to be an ongoing problem for anybody trying to do this sort of work.

Q: What, do you know, specifically, does this inclusion or overcoming these barriers look like?

Ed

There'd be two parts to it. You would be looking at an extra, a conscious extra effort to create the invitations, to identify folks that would have influence and you create the persuasions to have people come into your program. But, it's, that's only half of the story is, then that you would also actually locate yourself out in those various communities for a meeting or to create a type of a gathering that would make it easier for someone that may be a little intimidated by that setting to come on to it. It could be a barbecue, it could be aYwe've had pretty good luck with political rallies.

Q: And do you, are you just saying, well, you're welcome here? Or is it more active than that?

Ed

Well, it starts with you're welcome here for sure. But, you would be looking for every possible excuse that you could dream up to have them play a leadership or a participatory at least role.

Q: You're talking about active invitation rather than just saying, we welcome you?

Ed

Yeah, targeted.

Looking to the Future

Q: Okay. Let's look at the future now. What's the picture, what are the challenges, where are you going?

Ed

Our community doesn't have an identity. We don't know who we are. We, we probably don't know where we're going yet, even though we've been doing visioning and mission work and doing this sort of thing for quite a long time, we find it to be a fairly elusive project. And, some things are coming clear. Elements of this are beginning to come clear and so I think that probably the single most exciting factor of the future is that we will find it. We will figure out what we're the best in the world at doing. We're flirting with some of those ideas right now and this second year project that was mentioned a little bit earlier is actually focused around the idea that has been generated through all of this work, to become a center of the world, so to speak, a place where people can come to learn about community development. Because you see,

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we are a real life case. We are very much in the transition ourselves and, yet we also know that we are not the best in the world. There's lots of communities that have developed better than we have.

But we also know that we're kind of a clean slate. We haven't made any irreversible decisions yet. We're away from the city. We have easy access onto the highway, and it doesn't take that long to get to the airport. We actually have two local airports. And we have, no less than six retreat centers. It's a beautiful part of the country and it's naturally oriented that way and we have six of them. These would be conference centres, retreat centres, places where people can come and stay overnight and enjoy the dark and the quiet and the fresh air and that sort of thing.

And so we realized that with the coterie of people that are available to be tapped, resourced, in leadership roles, in particular helping other people to learn, roughly the 200 that have gone through the class, and combined with a choice of facilities, why don't we use this clean slate of real things, real activity - maybe a better way of saying that is just to, our group figured out that we could be a learning lab, that there's an awful lot that we could learn - if we were to go ahead and just get into the business of education of, related to the community development, then we're going, we're going to gain access to some of the finest minds in the country and we would also then, so we would benefit ourselves, but we would have done that by setting the stage where other communities could come on in and learn the same stuff. And, this is kind of a nice thing for us to do for other communities, but, you can see real quickly that we're also counting on them paying, or helping pay, for the costs to bringing these experts in.

So, this will be our first year in pulling off a community development conference. We're calling it not just an ordinary conference because, it's not going to be just a place for people to stage ideas, but rather we've got it organized in such a way that three will be real life case studies related to our community, that these experts will be developing while the conference attendees watch them, even to the point where many of the participants will be part of the process. They won't just be watching. Or they won't just be hearing about something that happened at another time, in another place, that they'll be participating in community development, led by these various experts on the spot. You know, it's the ultimate hands-on activity in a real life learning lab.

We can do that. And of course what we're going to do then is to set out to do that better than anybody else.

Gaps in Rural Leadership Training

And thinking about what gaps there are in rural leadership, according to our experience anyway, I'm pretty sure that the number one item would have to be things related to the big picture, the **long range view**, the ability to see things that are not there already.

A lot of times that overworked word of 'visioning' gets put in there and that probably is the right

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word but it's a tired word. Folks are pretty, ah, have heard that about enough now, that it doesn't really mean anything. And so, I think that the single first factor that I would list in answer to your question, would be the long view. The 'big picture'. Seeing beyond what's there in front of you right now and even to the point of being able to look at the positive aspects, look at those things that are building blocks that do exist already and that you could see how those foundation points could be used as beginning points to build something very different. Something better, something more, something more appropriate for future needs, and to be, just like any kind of education or training program, have a fairly clear picture of what is and also a fairly clear picture of where you want to go and to be able to understand the increments between.

Because the law of nature that applies here is that you may be able to see how you get from point A to point Z, and you might think that that's a three step process, but as soon as you start working with a group of people, that becomes a three hundred step process. You need to be able to back down to where you can see those increments and you probably will take three steps up and one step back, but as long as your direction's good, that's all right. Let the people walk like they're going to walk, but not lose sight of your direction.

The second most important factor is the ability **to generate or create trust**. There's an old adage that says that the messenger is more important than the message. I suspect that's true, because, you know that when you get into the dynamics of leadership and group dynamics and this is all part of how a community works, people will get behind a certain leader, so to speak, and not behind others, and they'll be more inclined to get behind a good leader, even if the issue isn't the way they want it to be, because they know they can always adjust the issue. And, so, the whole point of this is, I guess you could use the word 'buy in'.

There's an awful lot of people trying to do leadership in local communities that have great ideas. They're good thinkers and they even are hooked onto very worthwhile issues, but they have no skill, no ability to create 'buy in'. And if there's no 'buy in', nobody's going anywhere. You don't really have a leader. They'll go ahead and do a lot of good works and, and they may even get a few people to work for a short period of time to, to create some short result, but, there won't be anything that's lasting that comes out of that. And, certainly, as soon as the leader's gone, the issues gone, or the project's gone. So, I think the second thing that I would put up there, is that there's no place for people to go to learn how to create 'buy in'. And even if you did have a course of some sort that would give you the steps for creating that, 'buy in', that trust, then they're not going to get it. It's not something that you can read about or, or listen about, until you've actually taken some apprenticeship type steps to do that. So, I think it's the weak link there, I mean it certainly shows up in real life. But, an effective leader will always be able to create 'buy in'. That little law is exploited on a daily basis in the advertising world. I mean, what in the world does a superstar basketball player know about the construction, engineering and construction of good shoes? Nothing at all. But, those shoes are going to be sold because that basketball player says that's what you ought to buy.

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