



# **Engaging the Democracy of Civil Discourse**

*Translating Creativity, Citizen Entrepreneurship,  
and Cultural Development into the Rural/Small  
Community Context in the United States*

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Title:** **Engaging the Democracy of Civil Discourse:  
*Translating Creativity, Citizen Entrepreneurship, and Cultural  
Development into the Rural and Small Community Context in the  
United States***

### **Presentation Abstract**

Most work in the area of creative economies and cultural development focuses on large metropolitan areas. Yet, in the United States, thousands of rural/small communities (populations 25,000 or less) face many of these same issues without having the human and financial capital resources these large population centers have more readily available to them to find solutions. In addition, many rural/small communities face the loss of traditional economic resources they have counted on for decades. To complicate matters, this economic loss is often combined with a dramatic influx of new citizens, rising property taxes, and increased demand for social services, threatening to destroy the cultural infrastructure and “sense of place” that has historically defined these communities. In addition, this accelerated rate of change and transition has produced an increasing lack of civility that has found its way into their day-to-day public discourse, making citizen interaction uncomfortable and creative decision-making difficult if not impossible.

This highly interactive session consists of representatives from two very different communities in the United States: the New Richmond area community in eastern Wisconsin, population 12,000 and Brigham City, Utah, population 17,000, each with a unique set of economic, social, and political challenges facing them. The presentation covers the practice strategies each community designed and implemented to use their arts, heritage, and culture to promote civil discourse; strengthen local cultural infrastructure; re-use/re-purpose historic buildings to create new social gathering places; create innovative public/private partnerships to maximize local resource capacity; expand the role of community foundations in supporting this work; and design new strategies to restore the environmental balance between these rural/small communities and the physical geography in which they exist. This Salon session highlights what individuals from each community - both city staff and citizen volunteers - have learned as they tapped their creative resources to address civility; promote cultural development; increase citizen entrepreneurship; and achieve economic sustainability, helping each of them face their future with a renewed vision and a commitment to community self-determination.

### **Salon Facilitator**

Patrick Overton, Ph.D., Director, The Front Porch Institute, and Facilitator for the Brigham City and New Richmond Area Community Front Porch Projects

### **Session Presenters:**

Jim Counter, President, New Richmond Area Community Foundation, New Richmond, Wisconsin  
Joe Kerlin, Director of Parks and Recreation for the City of New Richmond, Wisconsin  
Phil Carlson, Landscape Architecture Intern, University of Wisconsin, Madison  
Paul Larsen, Director, Economic Development for Brigham City Corporation, Utah  
Roger Manning, Vice-President of Academy Square Foundation, Brigham City, Utah

## Introduction

Every community, regardless of its size, finds itself facing periods of transition. Decisions made before and during this transition often define the community for years to come. Unfortunately, many times, these decisions are made in reaction to what is going on rather than in anticipation of these developments and often don't provide what is needed for the community and its leaders to make informed decisions to navigate through the turmoil and maintain effective and constructive community "self-determination." And, more often than not, the planning process ends up addressing the "symptoms" rather than the deeper problems they represent.

To compound this problem, many rural/small communities within 50-100 miles of major metropolitan communities are being confronted with a rapidly growing new reality, a sudden and overwhelming influx of people who have chosen to live outside the urban area where they work; seeking what they believe will be a richer "quality of life" in a rural/small community. These "rural/urbans" are starting to have significant impact on many communities that, prior to this point in their history, have remained fairly small, self-sustaining, and geographically isolated. That sense of isolation no longer exists and there are few rural communities that are being spared this increase of people seeking the "rural experience" while still being connected to and working in the urban setting.

The potential impact on rural and small communities is deep and long lasting as a clear cycle begins: population size increases dramatically; housing prices soar, many times placing home ownership out of reach for those whose families represent generations of people who have lived in that community; costs for education rise steeply, placing demands on what are many times already outdated and over-utilized facilities and challenging the school district's ability to provide the quality education people have come to expect in small communities; people no longer know their neighbors and eventually a huge "disconnect" between people in the community begins to develop; and the "small town" Sense of Place begins to disappear and people find themselves experiencing a level of discomfort they can't explain. As the tension from these changes increases, so does the distance between the various individuals and groups within the community. At the same time, the overall quality of life in the community everyone cherishes and takes for granted, begins to diminish. Sometimes, when the situation continues too long, a community finds itself in a constant state of growing confusion, tension becomes the norm and this leads to open conflict, increased incivility, and eventually confrontation within the community. One important outcome of this "cycle" is the people within the community best able to address these changes and conflicts end up exhausted and frustrated because they can't seem to make a difference, leading to "community burnout."

We must address these issues. Not only because our rural and small communities already facing enormous challenges, but because these challenges will likely only increase, not decrease over the next few decades. These communities are facing enormous pressure to preserve their cultural values, and there is serious disintegration of not only their cultural facilities and infrastructure, but their very social structure. We must also address these issues because of the magnitude of the problem. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, rural and small communities in America (population under 50,000) represent over 80% of the nation's landscape. Some 55 million people live in these communities that contain a diverse array of arts and historic resources. These communities include farmsteads and ranches to main streets, country stores, schools, churches, mill villages, bridges, scenic byways, fieldstone wall, archeological sites and

much more. While these small yet essential communities struggle to address the challenges in front of them, the United States has failed to address the overall impact these rural/small communities have on both the economy and the culture of this country. This paper focuses on two different rural communities that have engaged with in-depth, cultural planning projects to address these issues. The first is the New Richmond area community in Wisconsin and the second is Brigham City in northwestern Utah.

#### **A. The New Richmond Area Community Front Porch Project**

The New Richmond area community exists within St. Croix County on the eastern border between Minnesota and Wisconsin, the fastest growing county in Wisconsin. The area community population comparison between the 1990 census and the estimated 2008 population shows a 66% increase in population. This magnitude of change at such an accelerated rate in such a relatively short time has taken a tremendous toll on the community. Areas of agricultural land have started to be replaced by housing developments to accommodate this increased population. The result is that people living here no longer recognize the small town “sense of place” of the community. The New Richmond Front Porch Project was started eighteen months ago to address the lack of civility in the community. An extensive cultural assessment process was undertaken followed by an in-depth cultural planning project. The New Richmond Area Community Cultural Plan is being finalized and will be discussed during the presentation.

One outcome of this cultural planning process is the recognition of deferred philanthropic giving over the past twenty years and, as a result, the need to raise large sums of capital to address this need. During the timeframe of the Front Porch Project, the community has passed a 93 million dollar referendum for new schools, the largest school referendum in the history of the state of Wisconsin. In addition, recognizing the reality of deferred giving and the cultural facility gathering place needs of the community, the Cultural Plan is proposing the establishment of a five million dollar cultural trust and a fifteen million dollar cultural facilities capital fund. Needless to say, this community is undertaking a significant challenge as it moves forward with implementing the cultural plan. One important outcome of the planning process is the emergence of the New Richmond Area Community Foundation serving as the lead agency for the Front Porch Project.

#### **B. The Brigham City Front Porch Project**

Brigham City, Utah is a community of approximately 17,000 people situated in the very northwest corner of Utah. It is the most northern point of the Utah Wasatch Front, identified as one of the fastest growing areas in the United States. While the population of Brigham City has stayed relatively stable, the portion of the Wasatch Front from Provo to Brigham City has exploded. During the 2000 census, one county north of Salt Lake City showed a 26% population increase in just ten years. This increase has steadily continued during the past eight years. In fact, as the nation’s housing industry has slowed down significantly the past two years, the communities on the Wasatch Front have maintained a steady, 13% increase in home values and an 8% increase in housing starts. While the Wasatch Front has undergone a dramatic population increase, Brigham City has not.

Although it appears it isn't going to be too long in the future before it does begin to have to address these issues of population increase. In fact, the community leaders have clearly understood what is coming their way and have spent the last five years attempting to position the community for controlled growth and development. In this sense, Brigham City is at the opposite end of the growth spectrum from New Richmond area community. The Academy Square Project is a restoration, renovation, and new construction of a historic building that will then expand to include the Academy Square Plaza. The estimated cost for this project is ten million dollars. It will be an entire downtown city block, serving as the community's "Front Porch Gathering Place." In addition to the Academy Square block, the Brigham City Front Porch Project will also add a new City museum along with targeting a three block long, three block wide Downtown Cultural District, to revitalize the downtown area businesses and provide a connection between the new Academy Square and the historic downtown area.

This paper is divided into three sections: Understanding the Cultural Context of Rural/Small Communities in the United States; a focus on Overarching Issues Facing Rural/Small Communities in the U.S.; and finally, Translating Community Cultural Development into the Rural/Small Community Context. While this paper focuses on rural/small communities within the United States, these same issues exist in rural/small communities in nations around the world. While arts and culture are valued in different ways in different cultures, the challenges many times remain the same: limited resources; overwhelming facility needs; and priority given to large population centers. Because of this, it is hoped the recommended practice strategies for translating cultural development into the rural/small community context will assist all conference participants.

### ***1. Understanding The Cultural Context of Rural/Small Communities in the United States***

Most work in the area of creative economies and cultural development is done in large, metropolitan centers. Yet, in the United States, thousands of rural and small communities face many of these same issues without having the resources metropolitan communities have more readily available to them to find solutions. This is significant because it represents a large percentage of our population. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, rural/small towns in America with a population under 50,000 represent over 80% of the nation's landscape. They estimate some 55 million people live in these communities that contain a diverse array of historic, arts, and cultural resources. Yet, from the beginnings of these rural/small communities, they have struggled to be able to experience the same contribution that arts, heritage, and culture can make to their communities the same way as their fellow citizens who live in larger urban population centers. Life is different in these rural and small communities. So is the creative, cultural context in which these communities were brought into existence and exist today.

In addition, many of these small communities are facing the loss of traditional economic resources they have counted on for decades, losing natural resources through outside extraction industries that are running out of resources. When these resources disappear, the loss of jobs is significant and the damage to the local economy enormous. Many of these communities are one-company towns, basically brought into existence to support the mining and the extraction process. As this industry ends, so does the economic stability and sustainability of these communities.

The economic impact of these lost extraction industries and the jobs they provided has resulted in population losses for the rural/small communities that had grown to depend upon them. Ironically, the loss of population is often being followed with the loss of the final resource these communities have to offer, their rich, agricultural land. We are now witnessing a dramatic influx of new citizens into many of these communities, purchasing up what used to be agricultural land used for dairy farming or crops. In Richmond Township, just outside New Richmond, what used to be 333 dairy farms is now down to three. This influx of new citizens causes many problems. In particular, the higher property taxes and increased demand for social services are both threatening to destroy the cultural infrastructure and “sense of place” that has historically defined these communities. As a result of this accelerated rate of change and transition, an increasing lack of civility has found its way into the day-to-day public conversations, moving from friendly sharing to intense and dramatic debate, making citizen interaction uncomfortable and difficult to maintain. This, in turn, has eroded public trust in local government, often creating discomfort and an increased incivility, producing a negative community communication climate. The cultural context of rural/small communities is undergoing enormous change and transition, and so are the citizens who live in these communities.

## II. Overarching Issues Facing Rural/Small Communities in the U.S.

### A. A Community’s “Sense of Place” and Its “Poetry of Place”

Wallace Stegner, a well-known Wisconsin author described the importance of a community’s *Sense of Place*. While Stegner includes the way a community interacts with each other in his description, most people have come to think of a community’s *Sense of Place* more as the geography of a place rather than its population. When Stegner introduced this phrase, he was identifying something that has a powerful impact on the development of a community. The landscape that surrounds people often influences how a community develops by defining its economy and role in the large commerce of the region based on the geographical resources available to that community. One way to understand *Sense of Place* is to define it as the way the geography of place impacts the people who live in that place. Clearly, New Richmond has a strong *Sense of Place*.

But geography and landscape are only one aspect of *Place* that needs to be identified to fully understand the basic nature of a community. Another critical aspect is the intersection between the individual and the larger community in which he/she lives. In 1999, I served as keynote speaker for the Midwest Rural Forum hosted by the Northern Lakes Center for the Arts in Amery, Wisconsin. During this speech, I talked about this aspect of life in rural and small communities by introducing the term *Poetry of Place*. I defined it as the impact people have on a place as a result of the way they interact with each other in the community setting. In other words, the term *Sense of Place* defines how geography influences/impacts the people who live in a particular place, while a community’s *Poetry of Place* defines how the way people interact with each other influences/impacts the geography. It is the give and take, the dialectic, the balance between these two aspects of place, the *Sense of Place* and the *Poetry of Place*, that have the greatest influence in the development of a particular community giving each community what could be called its “essence of place.”

Individuals can live in a particular place and not be a part of the community in which they live, making them residents rather than citizens. People are no longer tied to one place or, for that matter, one job or profession. Rural and small communities all across the United States are experiencing this in a unique way as individuals who have an idealized version of rural life and move out of urban areas into rural communities close by in order to have the “rural experience,” even though they don’t really know what that means. What they do know is that they no longer want the urban experience, and they are willing to try something new. Increasingly, as people move out beyond the suburban communities into rural areas, they are not only changing the landscape of rural communities, they are changing the community’s inscape as well, its *Poetry of Place*.

What does this mean? First, it means that a community has to pay attention to both its geography (*Sense of Place*) and its community social interaction (*Poetry of Place*). Second, every rural/small community in our country right now has to come to grips with major changes coming their way or already present. Third, focusing on and promoting economic development may end up not being the most efficient strategy to help a community grow and prosper. At least, not the way we have traditionally defined economic development. It has become clear over the past decade that efforts to attract businesses and industries to a community must be based on efforts to attract people to a community because it is people that make businesses and industries function. When a business is looking to locate, they are looking for more than land or adequate natural resources or good transportation arteries. They are looking for a location that provides a good place to live, to locate families. They are looking for a combination of a community’s *Sense of Place* (the geography and its impact on the people) and its *Poetry of Place* (the people, the way they interact with each other, and the impact this has on the geography). What we know is that what works in one place may not work in another. And, while there are “tried and true” strategies that have historically helped communities prosper, there is enough change and transition going on in our communities these strategies may no longer be effective.

#### **B. *Emergence of a “New Regionalism” and “New Localism”***

Before beginning the data presentation sections of this report, there is one final idea that needs to be introduced. Two parallel trends seem to be developing in rural and small communities in addition to the new urban to rural movement, what could be called “New Rurbanism.” One is a growing awareness of the need for communities to start cooperating and collaborating with each other. This collaboration and cooperation is expanding beyond the traditional boundaries between communities, including the long standing city/township, city/county and county/county barriers. The result of this can be seen in the quiet emergence of a “new regionalism,” a self-determined and self-defined geographical and social boundary line and seems to be the strongest in areas that consist primarily of rural/small communities. This new regionalism encourages cooperation and collaboration between entities that historically have been competitive and uncooperative. As these collaborations increase, as traditional boundaries change, the historic lines of demarcation are dissolving and/or are being redefined and redrawn. While there are positive aspects to this change, it is not a simple or easy change to make.

The second trend, although not as obvious, is the slow emergence of what appears to be a “new localism.” As a new regionalism emerges, it is essential that each and every community be clear about whom it is and what it needs, resulting in a clearly defined community sense of self. Or, as discussed in the previous section, a good balance between a community’s *Sense of Place* and its *Poetry of Place*. This is differentiated from the past localism, which was the result of either geographic isolation or self-protective/self-imposed actions to protect a community from outside forces influencing and co-opting its authority and autonomy – the “City Fortress” syndrome. The new “localism” is based on the desire of people to regain their community-based “self-determination.” For too long, influences outside the local rural/small community setting have impacted what is done and how it is done. For too long, outside trends have influenced a community without being clear what it does to the community. The Wisconsin Idea established long ago promotes self-determination and, more importantly, the right and responsibility of local citizens to use this self-determination to do what was best for their community. This is no less true today than when it was first introduced.

The emergence of these trends together – a “new regionalism” and a “new localism” is presenting one of the most dynamic and interesting social and political convergences to impact rural/small communities in over a century. The reality is that every community, regardless of its location is having the traditional boundary line between city, township, and county undergoing some change. This appears to be especially true in rural areas. For some, it is a change driven by economic necessity. So much out-migration of citizens and resources have occurred in rural and small communities while, at the very same time, significant “in-migration” of new people and new resources has occurred as well – that most communities simply can’t exist on the same concept of “commerce” that brought it into existence. These emerging changes present enormous conflict and opportunity at the same time.

The implications of these trends and the potential conflict they bring with them can not be ignored. What we have not done in the United States is to clearly define the impact our rural/small communities have on our national commerce. When you combine the impact of the demise of the industrial belt economy, the diminishing resources facing the extraction industry of the Midwest, and the reduced natural resources and challenges facing the timber and fishing industry of the northwest, we have an economic and social “perfect storm” brewing. As our rural/small communities attempt to address these issues with the traditional limited resources available to them, few have acknowledged the fact that the loss of these old economies is the major challenge facing them.

The single largest challenge facing our rural/small communities is their ability to continue to exist, to meet the changing needs of their citizens, without giving up the essential part of who they are and why they came into existence. This challenge can be addressed several ways. This paper proposes one of the most important ways to address these challenges is to address the essential contribution arts, heritage, and culture make to the very capacity of these communities to envision a new future, placing arts, heritage, and culture not as amenities to improve the quality of life but rather the essential foundation upon which the future of these rural/small communities rest.

### **III. Translating Community Cultural Development into the Rural/Small Community Context**

There are many factors that make cultural development in rural/small communities significantly different, and many times, more difficult. This section translates cultural development into the rural/small community context by identifying these factors and then making specific practice strategies to address them. There will be three sections of factors that will be explored: A. Population size: focusing on the various ways the impact of small populations and small organizations have on cultural development; B. Ruralism: exploring the predominant negative rural self image and historic external bias towards rural/small communities; and, C. From Extraction to Expression Economy: a translation of creative economy and cultural infrastructure strategies into the rural/small community context.

#### **A. Population Impact on Rural/Small Communities**

##### ***1. Decreasing Population Size of Rural/Small Communities***

Not only are most of our rural/small communities small in population size now, many of them have been losing population due to poor economic conditions. Fading industrial belt communities have experienced countless closed factories in the eastern portion of the United States. Diminishing natural resources have resulted in reduced extraction industry jobs in much of the Midwest and western states. And, federal limits to logging and the listing of salmon and other fish on the endangered species list has significantly reduced economic health in the Northwestern states.

While many people use the population size of less than fifty thousand to define rural/small communities, the reality is, most rural/small communities in the United States consist of population sizes considerably less. Further analysis of the data available show that most rural/small communities consist of populations of less than 10,000. The smaller population in rural and small communities results in significantly less financial, human, and social capital needed to make cultural development successful. For example, gaining support from just .05% of a population in a large city can result in considerable human and financial capital to pay for large cultural infrastructure growth and development. Gaining support from .05% of a rural/small community results in considerably less human and financial capital to support cultural development. Unfortunately, the costs of cultural facilities are not directly dependent on geography or do they take population size or density into consideration. While large cities are likely to have larger facilities and perhaps more of them, the cost of constructing a performance theater is not significantly different between large and small population centers. In fact, when costs of having adequate building supplies available and the workers needed to do the design and construction of the facilities in rural/small communities are factored in, it generally makes it more expensive to build even modest cultural facilities. When one adds the additional cost of building design and engineering that is generally performed by firms outside the community and therefore more expensive, these combine to present a formidable challenge rural and small communities involved in these kinds of cultural infrastructure facility building.

## **Practice Strategies Recommended to Address Decreasing Population Size**

1. Think outside the box and don't allow population size to limit the ability to think big. The realities facing rural/small communities aren't going to change in the future. But the small population also provides the opportunity to engage a larger percentage of the community in the planning and implementation process, creating opportunities for citizens to build a strong ownership for the projects. Or, perhaps a better way to say it is to think "inside the box" because it is unlikely any resources from outside the community are going to suddenly present themselves soon.
2. There is a great amount of wealth in rural/small communities. Rural and small communities are known for their resourcefulness and their innovativeness working with what they have within their community. And, while philanthropic giving in many of these communities over the past twenty years has been lower than normal, there is about to be a very large wealth transfer from the elder generation to their children and some of this wealth might just find its way into the general community good.
3. Don't underestimate the ability of rural/small communities to accomplish any goal they set. They aren't afraid to try, and they usually accomplish whatever it is they decide to do. What is required is a clear commitment, an understanding of the reasons why the project is important, and a strong tie-in to local community, cultural values.

## ***2. Rapidly Increasing Population in Rural/Small Communities***

This situation is the opposite of the factor just listed and was described earlier in the paper. Most of this rapid increase is the direct result of people from urban centers moving to rural/small communities within reasonable driving distance of where they work, causing property values and community service needs to increase while not contributing significantly to the increase of human and social capital. Many of these new citizens are residents rather than citizens of the community, choosing to not engage in the local community setting. Not only do these new residents change the local community cultural environment, their lack of engagement raises serious questions about the ability of the local community to meet the needs of its increasing population.

As many of these rural/small communities addressed the loss of population, there was a period of time with a great amount of deferred maintenance on existing cultural facilities. This was coupled with deferred philanthropic giving so many rural/small communities currently find themselves in a situation with a hefty cultural infrastructure challenge. With this new increase of population, combined with the deferred maintenance and loss of traditional community gathering places, the need for the community to look at creating new gathering places needs to be a priority. This is the right time to be talking about the important role that arts, heritage, and culture play in providing not only these gathering places but also some very positive contributions to the community at the same time. In many ways, the challenges presented by the rapid increase of population also presents opportunities that can move the cultural development agenda in rural/small communities forward in a positive and constructive manner.

## **Practice Strategies to Address Rapid Population Increases in Rural/Small Communities**

1. Perhaps it is here, more than in any other area of difference in rural/small communities we find the role of improving the cultural infrastructure of a community to be so important. Cultural facilities provide essential “gathering places” where people can meet, interact, and get to know each other. Once people understand this, they are usually willing to work to make it happen. It isn’t easy, but it can make a significant difference.
2. The arts, heritage, and culture can be a wonderful way to recreate history and help new people in the community learn about the history, heritage, cultural traditions and heroes that made the community what it is today. Providing ways to connect new citizens to this community story is also an excellent way to reconnect long-term citizens to their story as well, reminding them of the rural genius that made it happen.
3. Getting new citizens involved in this process, encourages them to have a broader, deeper engagement in the democracy of civil discourse. By working side-by-side with long-term citizens, the cultural development process provides cultural bridges between the two groups, creating a stronger sense of community. It is also a great way to get them involved in the community, meeting new people, and helping develop a sense of being a “citizen” rather than a “resident.”

### ***3. Small Number of Arts/Cultural Organizations in Rural/Small Communities***

Generally, there are not very many arts organizations in rural/small communities. The smaller the population size, the lower the number of arts and cultural organizations. In fact, it is not uncommon for there to be only one organization, a community arts organization that is both presenter and producer of whatever arts experiences are available. And sometimes, the organization that provides these services may not be an arts or cultural organization at all but organizations such as chambers of commerce or community civic clubs. The other arts experiences available are small, single owner “for-profit” ventures including dance studios, visual arts galleries and presenting/concert series programs.

This doesn’t mean the arts in these communities potentially has any less impact than larger communities. It means the impact is likely to be more indirect than direct. Thus, the term “creative economy” is less applicable and difficult to support.

When the focus is turned to cultural organizations, it is likely there is at least one “historic” organization committed to preservation, restoration, and history of a community, but in rural/small communities it is unlikely for there to be any museums. It is also unlikely that the number of arts organizations in rural/small communities is going to increase. With the dwindling financial and human capital resources (see below) within many of our rural/small communities, the number of organizations may well decrease over the next five to ten years. We are at a critical turning point in the history of arts in rural and small communities.

## **Practice Strategies to Address the Low Number of Arts/Cultural Organizations**

1. Assess where the rural/small community arts/heritage/cultural organizations are – that is, what is their current situation. This assessment needs to result in concrete, direct resources being put into these organizations to increase their resource capacity, both human and financial capital;
2. Establish technical assistance and organizational development resources to address the issues facing these organizations and help them build capacity to become more stable and sustainable within the local, rural/small community context;
3. Don't limit funding support to traditional arts organizations. It is important to give communities the opportunity to identify their arts and cultural resources and then create innovative partnerships, collaborations, and alliances to maximize these local resources.

### ***4. Loss of Human Capital And Increased Average Age of Volunteers***

The number of volunteers in rural/small communities is diminishing and the average age of the ones who are volunteering is getting older. These two trends are going to reach a critical stage in the next five years and will significantly impact the ability of rural/small community nonprofit, community-based, arts and cultural organizations to function effectively. While there are limited amounts of arts and cultural organizations to serve rural/small communities, there is a greater crisis just around the corner relating to the diminishing human capital that is available to help these nonprofits survive. The nonprofit organization is premised on the concept of volunteerism, especially the community-based arts and cultural organizations. Not only is the number of people available to volunteer diminishing, many of the volunteers we do have are getting older.

Many rural/small community arts and cultural organizations consist of members who are well over 60 years old. And few, if any of these organizations have the financial resources to pay for people to do the jobs that have been historically performed by volunteers. The issue of losing volunteers and not being able to recruit new, younger volunteers is not new, but it is reaching a critical stage as our current volunteers age and no longer can perform these duties. If something isn't done to address this issue, our arts and cultural organizations simply won't be able to function. This raises serious questions about the very survival of the cultural ecology of our rural/small communities.

There are many reasons for this decline of volunteers. The first and most obvious is the fact that the baby boomer generation has not, as yet, stepped forward to take up its responsibilities for giving back to their community. Second, many rural/small community organizations are very small, and it is difficult to break into that social structure, especially if you are new to the community. And finally, many people just aren't excited about getting involved in outdated organizations that spend more time fighting and arguing than they do in completing the work.

## **Practice Strategies to Address Reduction of Human Capital**

1. Up to this point in the history of rural and small communities, most of the work of arts and cultural organizations has been self-sustaining. But, the time has come to address this issue head on. We have to develop aggressive programming to address organizational capacity building. We need to train new volunteers, and this won't happen until we identify people who have the potential and desire to volunteer in their community. This links right back to the issues surrounding people being willing to become engaged in their community.
2. Arts and cultural organizations need to do a better job of communicating who they are, what they do, and why they do it. We need to create meaningful cultural plans that don't focus on why the arts and cultural organizations need support but rather how the arts and cultural organizations contribute to the community.
3. Rural/small community non-profits are going to have to change the way they do their business. They have to streamline their structures, liven up their programming, and enable people to enter in and leave the organization more easily. People aren't going to continue to give their lives to one organization. We need to recognize this short-burst approach and not consider it representative of a lower level of commitment, just a different kind of commitment.

## **B. Ruralism: Addressing the Internal Rural Self Image and External Bias That Exists Towards Rural/small Communities**

### ***1. Failure to Acknowledge/Honor The History of Arts in Rural/Small Communities***

There is a long and important history of arts and culture in rural and small communities but it is a history unique to that setting. It is a history that celebrates self-improvement and self-education. It is a history that is based on people participating in and experiencing the arts on a personal basis. It is a history that related the arts and cultural experience to what was happening at the local level. And when it did bring in arts from outside the community, it was done for the purpose of self-education and self-improvement. What needs to happen is for the citizens in these communities to begin to acknowledge this history and realize they have a history that should make them proud. Some of this stems from the Puritan values influence dominant in early communities in this country. The current struggle between evangelical, religious right and the arts stems directly from this history and unresolved tension.

The problem is that citizens in rural/small communities don't always know their history of arts and cultures. There is a long and glorious tradition of arts and culture within the rural/small community history, but it rarely found its way into traditional arts and cultural events or organizations. The movement was sparked by the Lyceum Speakers Bureau and expanded with the explosion of Literary Scientific Circles connected to the Chautauqua movement. The Chautauqua movement had even more impact when the Tent Chautauqua movement began at the beginning of the twentieth century, bringing arts and culture to people in rural communities all across the nation, beginning a rich history of nurturing the arts in rural/small communities all across this nation.

## **Practice strategies recommended to Increase Awareness of History**

1. Rural/small communities don't need to be saved, they need to be savored and one of the ways to do this is to remind them of their rich heritage and long history of creative, innovative expressions. Rural/small communities don't need to be given "culture," they have their own. What needs to be done is for people who work in this setting to understand the unique culture that is present and honor it while challenging those in the community to move beyond what they have done into new ways of doing things.
2. Help people see the nature of creativity and how engaging in creative experiences can not only enhance an individual's sense of self, it can also encourage that individual to become more active, more involved, and more engaged in the democracy of civil discourse.

## **2. *The Challenge of Arts & Cultural Vocabulary***

The very use of the terms "arts" and "culture" creates challenges for some people in rural and small communities, especially those engaged in community cultural development. Many citizens think of the arts only as a product, a thing that is purchased or a performance attended by people who are "cultured." And they most certainly don't think of creativity or arts or culture as something that has much to do with their own lives. This, despite the fact that the rural genius was what brought them into existence and helped them survive against all odds.

It isn't so much that they won't use the words but they just don't see the relevance of those words in their day-to-day lives. In addition, promoting the concept of a "creative economy" in a rural/small community is beyond difficult - it is almost impossible. Very few rural/small communities can really focus on generating a "creative economy." And, unfortunately, those that do, quite often pay the indirect price of losing the very "sense of place" and "poetry of place" that makes their community special in the first place.

Most people in rural/small communities are direct and to the point. They are not big on using recognized buzz words and their communication exchanges rarely consist of this kind of language. Those working in the rural/small community setting need to be aware of this language barrier and be careful not to distance themselves from the people with whom they are working because of a failure to adapt their language strategies effectively.

## **Practice Strategies to Address Issues of Vocabulary**

1. Start with the term community development and then move to using the word cultural development. Help people explore what the word culture means and translate that into their own setting. Talk about the direct and indirect benefits of cultural development and then move into community arts development. If we use the vernacular of the field, the "practice jargon" all of us are accustomed to using amongst ourselves, we will only make our work harder. I have learned this the hard way. Language is the most essential "first bridge" that must be built with a community. And it is more important to learn their language than it is for them to know yours.

2. Promote the paradigm shift from “art as product and citizen as patron” to “art as process and citizen as participant.” This is consistent with the history of arts and culture being connected to ideas of self-education and self-improvement. When people see arts and culture as something that is connected to their own lives, it will make it more relevant and important. People need to think about arts and culture differently and that means we need to be talking about arts and culture differently. Nothing will change until this new vocabulary is learned.
  
3. The current arts and cultural development vocabulary of “creative economies” and “high creatives” that dominate the arts, cultural, and economic development world right now just aren’t going to make it in most rural/small communities. We need to communicate the same concepts but do so in a way that makes sense in a rural/small community setting. Instead of the arts and creativity, we need to talk about innovation and citizen entrepreneurship; instead of cultural facilities we need to be talking about community gathering places; instead of focusing on developing creative economies, we need to be talking about shifting the economic development focus away from extraction toward more constructive, sustainable, expression economy. One way to do this is to talk about the direct and indirect economic benefits of arts and culture and about moving from extraction to expression economy to help people understand alternative strategies that are viable and within their grasp.

### ***3. Tendency for Rural/Small Community Citizens to One-Down Local Community Arts/Cultural Expressions***

This relates to the image people who live in rural/small communities have of themselves. Many people in rural and small community don’t think of their own creative expressions and cultural traditions as real arts/culture, but rather just “folk arts.” Many citizens think that arts and culture are something other communities have and the only way they can enjoy them is to “import” them into their community. The sad thing about this reality is that many communities can raise substantial funds to bring in a state or regional arts group and yet can’t raise that same amount of money to support local arts, heritage, and cultural needs. Until the citizens of rural/small communities begin to recognize and honor their own “rural genius” it is unlikely ever to change the external bias (see next section) that exists against the quality and value of the local community arts experience.

### **Practice Strategies to Improve Individual and Community Self-Image**

1. Get citizens in rural and small communities to begin to value their own self-expressions and community-based art, heritage, and culture and identify and celebrate the citizens in their history who manifested creative “rural genius.” The best way to do this is to get them to participate in and experience the arts on a personal basis. When the individuals in a community begin to have this personal experience, it changes their sense of self and their self-esteem. This can have a dramatic impact on their overall “sense of place” and “poetry of place.” As the individual self-image improves so will their community self-image.

2. Focusing on promoting and presenting both local, community-based arts experiences and arts, heritage, and culture from outside the community provides the right balance to nurture the rural/small community. Because local, community-based arts and culture are not always valued within the community, some citizens accept the value placed on arts and culture from outside their own community.

#### ***4. Tendency for Those Outside Rural/Small Communities to Put-Down Local Arts, Heritage and Culture & Impose Outside Cultural Values***

People in rural/small communities don't need culture brought in - they need support for and respect of the culture they already have in place. People in rural/small communities are accustomed to hearing people outside their community put them down. Because it coincides with their negative self-image, they usually don't object. And this enables this internal and external negative image – this ruralism – to continue.

The way this ruralism is manifested by those outside the community involves several assumptions. First, people in rural/small communities are not capable of doing what needs to be done. Second, when it comes to arts and culture, rural/small community people don't have any. Third, since rural communities don't know about arts and culture and don't have any of their own of any consequence, it is clear they need to be told what is good. And, almost every time, what they are told is good is what people in the urban areas think is good. So this is what people in rural/small communities think they should have – arts and culture from the urban areas.

The place this external ruralism presents itself the most is when the “experts” come in from outside the community. Quite often, without intending to do so, they put down the local culture and impose their external values. There are assumptions about what people in rural/small communities really need, and often it has little to do with any interaction with the people who live in these communities. This has happened for so long in so many different ways that many rural/small communities just aren't interested in anyone from the outside coming into their community, whether they are economic, community, or culture development specialists. To many of them, “another consultant, another expensive report put on the shelf.”

One of the places this external value system imposition occurs the most is when architects come into a community to design a local cultural facility. Since there are few architects in rural/small communities that focus on large public facilities, it is not unusual for some firm from the nearest urban area to respond to an RFP and be selected. Unfortunately, it is also not unusual for some of these individuals to not know about the local community history and cultural values and not bother to ask. This often results in something being designed and built that has no connection to the local “sense of place” or “poetry of place” that are so important to the community. It is essential that we pay more attention to the local community voice in the planning process and be respected for what it says.

## **Practice Strategies to Improve Individual and Community Self-Image**

1. Educate people outside the community who work with rural/small communities about what is unique and important about the communities they serve. Help them understand what is special about rural/small communities and how to communicate with them without imposing outside values and putting down the local arts, heritage, and culture.
2. Don't impose external values on funding criteria. Create funding programs that are viable and applicable to the rural/small community setting. Don't always expect rural/small communities to adjust to funding programs that are designed for urban organizations. The issue facing rural/small community funding isn't access or excellence, it is access to excellence.
3. Create "Training of trainers" program for people who work in rural/small communities so they can learn a more effective, constructive communication style. The rural/small community context is different and requires special effort to adjust to it. But the key word there is "effort." If you don't know there is a problem, you won't exert any effort to fix it.
4. Don't do any work in rural/small communities if you are unwilling or unable to pay attention to learning what is special about their "sense of place" and "poetry of place." The citizens in these communities don't need to be "told" what to do, they need advise and assistance in identifying the best course of action to take.

## **C. From Extraction to Express Economy: Translation of Creative Economy and Cultural Infrastructure Strategies into the Rural/Small Community Context.**

### ***1. Project Timeline – Longer is always better than Shorter***

This is one of the challenges to doing effective community cultural development work in rural/small communities. It is always easier to go in, do the work, and get out. Yet, as one looks at all the issues identified in this paper, it is clear there is a lot of work to be accomplished before you can actually accomplish the work. This is not a play on words. It is one of the most important lessons I have learned in doing cultural development work in rural/small communities all over the United States.

Cultural development in rural/small communities can't be accomplished in a short interval. This kind of work takes time. First, the citizens have to get to know you. They won't accept you because you have credentials or because you hold a position. They will accept you because they get to know you and because they know you they begin to trust you. Rural/small communities don't need to be saved, they need to be savored and many people in rural and small communities are tired of outsiders trying to save them. Ever heard the term "carpetbagger?" If you haven't, you will if the people with whom you are working don't think you are taking the time to get to know them. They will determine the only reason you are there is to "extract" their resources by planning something that has nothing to do with them. Community cultural development in rural/small communities is relational. Always has been. Always will be.

What does it mean? Well, first of all, it means you don't jump in and just do a cultural assessment, make project recommendations and leave. People don't even know what the term cultural assessment means, let alone the development of a cultural plan. You have to find a good, core group of people with whom you can work and then you have to build that relationship. In rural/small communities, this relationship is built on trust, and trust is developed through relationship building that occurs over time. People in rural/small communities don't want someone to do something for them, they want someone who will help them do it themselves. And this requires the ability to translate and teach.

To do this work, you have to make the commitment to the community to be there, to make the translation into their unique community cultural context. The old adage is true, there is no rural/small community like any other. They are all unique, different, and require something that is community specific. This requires people who go into this setting to listen, and to look at their work less as a project and more as a partnership. Many people in this field don't have the time to do this, and many communities don't have the resources to pay for it. Community cultural development work in rural/small communities isn't for everyone. But, for those who enjoy it and excel at the work, it can be one of the most rewarding experiences anyone can have in any community setting.

### **Practice Strategies to Address Project Timelines**

1. Get to know the community, spend time with people, don't just share your expertise but be open to the wonderful things you can learn from them. Rural and small community people are quite extraordinary and well-worth the effort. Once you know them, they will listen to you. If they think you are a "know-it-all" they will endure you but not much more than that and your report will be just that, another report that finds its way into the bottom of some city or nonprofit administrator's desk drawer. The plan that works is the one that isn't a plan but an invitation to action that excites people and gets them doing. Take a longer time to do the project and spread it out over a larger number of shorter visits.
2. Create "training of trainers" programs and professional development opportunities for people doing work in rural/small communities. This includes University Extension Programs, state, regional, and national funding agencies. We need to train community cultural developers how to go into rural/small communities and accomplish this work. The University Extension Programs that were begun at the beginning of the last century are an excellent model to use. We need to value rural/small communities enough to let them know that we aren't trying to "save" them but rather help them with what it is they want to be doing.
3. Consider using community colleges and technical colleges as potential resource agencies for cultural development work in rural/small communities. This is a greatly untapped resource and should be considered one of the most valuable resources we have to use. Many of them exist in rural/small communities and this would help them make a stronger connection with the community.

## ***2. Need for Thorough Community Cultural Assessment***

You can't "cookie-cutter" an assessment in rural/small communities. They won't let you. They know who you are, why you are there, and they expect the best of what you do. They expect you to be honest and do what you say you are going to do. These are good people and they have tough standards. They expect it to relate to their community, not one that is two miles away or two states away. You need to be involved in the community; hold numerous interviews to reflect the wide diversity of the community, economically, politically, culturally. This is hard to do because so often, the people who bring you into a community have you there because they have a particular thing they want you to accomplish. But authentic, sustainable cultural development can only occur when a large percentage of the citizens in a community are engaged in the process. The advantage of working in a rural and small community is the prospect of obtaining a large buy-in is considerably higher because the population figures are considerably lower. Again, if the citizens in a rural/small community make the decision to do something, they generally will accomplish that goal. The challenge is to make sure they adopt the goals that represent the full community, not a small percentage of it.

Establish cooperative team with public/private partnerships. The role of arts, heritage, and cultural organizations is frequently not understood by either the community or, even more unfortunately, by the organizations themselves. Few arts, heritage, and cultural organizations have done an effective job in communicating who they are, what they do, and why they do it. Many of our nonprofit organizations in rural and small communities are fragile structures, with narrowly focused purposes, run by a very small group of people, many of whom are aging. They simply have not been successful in getting to the table. An effective assessment process will assist the achievement of this goal, giving these organizations a standing in the community they have not experienced before and helping them to take their rightful place at the table as the community creates a vision for the future.

### **Practice Strategies to Address Project Timelines**

1. Establish clear and effective public/private partnerships in the cultural assessment/cultural development work. Get public officials, educators, professionals involved. You need to get a wide mix of organizations including arts and cultural groups, the YMCA, School Districts, Youth, Seniors, etc. Create a broad coalition of people who are willing to work toward the common goal of promoting the community. And the more "public/private" partnerships you can establish through the community cultural planning process, the more likelihood the final plan will be implemented.
2. Sometimes, to accomplish the above, it means placing the role of arts and culture secondary to the goals of cultural development. This doesn't mean to sacrifice the arts and culture, but rather to focus on the common goals of a community and then work to show them how the arts and culture can contribute toward achieving that goal.

### ***3. Understand you Are Probably Going to Work with Part-time/Non-Paid Staff***

One of the greatest challenges facing those who do community cultural development in rural/small communities is the fact that often they are working with organizations that do not have paid staff and/or only part-time staff. This places an additional burden on the project facilitator to make sure that he/she translates the activities of the project (both the assessment and the cultural planning) in such a manner that it is understood by the participants. This can be an excellent opportunity to provide some indirect staff development and training (both full-time and part-time paid and non-paid administrators).

#### **Practice Strategies to Address Project Timelines**

1. Find a cultural planning partner who can provide some of the logistical services (office space, computer services, copy machine, etc) to keep the expenses down. Spending time in a rural/small community and trying to conduct business while you are on site is difficult enough without the necessary office support needed.
2. Sometimes this work is a good way to help organizations realize they need to hire paid staff (full-time or part-time) or, own up to the fact, that some volunteer has been serving in this capacity for quite a while (many times, the President or some other officer of the organization).
3. Helping these organizations find the financial resources to hire paid staff can move it to the next plateau. This can be one of the positive indirect benefits of the planning process and will help accomplish the practice strategy mentioned above.

### ***4. Keep Cultural Tourism in Balance with the Overall Needs of the Community And its “Sense of Place” and “Poetry of Place”***

While there is a clear and documented relationship between arts, heritage, culture and economic development, it is difficult to have a rural or small community exist primarily on the creative economy or on cultural tourism. There just aren't enough organizations or artists to make this work. If there is enough cultural tourism to make a difference the community itself can begin to change, losing part of the charm that made the community interesting and unique in the first place.

#### **Practice Strategies to Address Project Timelines**

1. Cultural tourism and its economic development impact (both direct and indirect) must be kept in balance with a community preserving the best of who it is and promoting the best of who a community can be. Big isn't always better. But, beginning the move from extraction to expression economy by promoting the role of arts, heritage, and culture to bring people to the community is an excellent way to make this important transition. It is all a matter of balance. Begin slow and develop ownership. People in rural/small communities need evidence that something works. Once they see it works, they will take on more.

## **5. *Lack of Granting/Funding Authority at Local Level***

Unfortunately, rural and small communities frequently find themselves competing for a very small amount of public money against a lot of very large communities and organizations presenting very expansive and sophisticated programming. To compound the problem, people making granting decisions often function from a narrowed perspective and bias against the value of the arts, heritage, and culture of rural and small communities as discussed above. And, unfortunately, grant minimums dollar-for-dollar matches are too high and the requirement for dollar-for-dollar match is too great.

There have been many federal, regional, and state initiatives to support rural/small community cultural development since the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts. Unfortunately, little of the planning, oversight, implementation, and evaluation of these programs engaged anyone at the local rural/small community level. In other words, many of these funding programs were created “for” rural/small communities. A more effective way to accomplish these goals would be to include the people who will actually use this funding.

One final observation on outside grants. One of the requirements of outside funding agencies is effective final reporting. The purpose of the final reports are usually two-fold: first, to ensure proper compliance with grant requirements. The second is to create a “story” that can be told to promote future and increased funding support. Quite often, I listen to people who work at funding agencies express their frustration at how ineffective these rural/small community final reports seem to be. The problem with this is not the final reporting, it is the expectations. Rural/small communities shouldn’t be expected to make the case for funding through their final reporting process. The grants were given for programming, not for advocacy. If these agencies want effective advocacy from the grants they give then they need to make sure those who receive these grants receive adequate training in grant reporting. The fact is, grant final report writing is just as demanding as is grant request writing. Unfortunately, we hardly ever pay attention to this aspect of the grant funding process.

### **Practice strategies to address low funding authority**

1. Rural and small communities need to maximize their ability to fund their own programming. Reinventing local community foundations is one strategy that can be employed to accomplish this goal. There is a current movement within the community foundation field to rethink and reframe community foundations from “depositories” to being “cultural catalysts.” It is an exciting time to be involved in these organizations, and they provide the very best opportunity for a community to do something to create an ability to be autonomous and not dependent on outside funding.
2. We must make the argument, again and again, how much arts, heritage, and culture make both a direct and indirect economic development impact in the community. One way to do this is to make sure the cultural assessment/planning process engages the community leaders who oversee economic development. Creating effective public-private partnerships with these agencies/institutions is an excellent way of promoting the arts, heritage, and culture while generating more local ownership.

## Conclusion

Doing community cultural development work in rural/small communities isn't for everyone. It isn't better or worse than doing this work in large urban settings, it's just that it is different and it requires a different set of skills. Individuals who do this work in this setting must have a genuine, authentic love for place and for people. They must also have the capacity to be a good teacher, a good listener, a good entrepreneurial developer, and, most important of all, a strong sense of self. Working in rural/small communities will challenge one's self-image. If a person isn't clear who they are, what they believe, and why they believe it, the people with whom he or she is working will lose interest. As stated earlier in the paper, doing community cultural development in rural/small communities is relational. It always has been. It always will be.

It isn't rocket science but working in rural/small communities is a lot more complicated than many people have recognized over the years. It is easy to assume the work will be done in a setting where people will respect the outside expertise, be eager to hear the assessment of their community and jump at the chance to put planning recommendations into practice. It just isn't that easy. The truth is, people who live in rural and small communities are very smart. They are very educated. And they are very innovative. And, most important of all, they are fiercely committed to the concept of self-determination. It is their community and they don't take the concept of citizenship lightly. After all, they will still be there long after the community cultural development specialist leaves. They want ownership. They will insist on ownership. If this doesn't happen, they will lose interest in a hurry and the plan, whatever it might be and however wonderful it might be, will simply join all the other "plans" collecting dust on the shelf in someone's office.

Over the past fifty years in the United States, rural/small communities have undergone enormous change. They are under siege from those outside the community and sometimes, even from those within it. Some are barely surviving. Others have already surrendered to the stress of change and transition and lost their identity and their "sense of place." But some are picking up the challenge to create new strategies to protect their community from the forces that threaten its ability to survive.

Over the course of the last ten years I have worked with communities across the United States that make it clear that they are not only alive and well, they are determined to surmount any challenge in front of them and ensure the future of their community. For these citizens, be they third or fourth generation or brand new to the community, there is a commitment to self-determination unlike anything I have ever witnessed before and I believe it is a force that will not be denied.

The task, no, the challenge, of those who enter these rural/small communities offering assistance is not to tell them what they need, but to help them figure it out for themselves so they can be about the important business of rebuilding the front porch of their community. Rural/small communities in the United States have always thrived against the odds, no matter how great they appeared to be. The somewhat contradictory values of rugged individualism and intense community spirit continue to join together to provide the energy, the shared vision, and the essential self-determination that overcome obstacles that many thought were impossible. There is a special satisfaction to be achieved knowing we helped citizens in rural/small communities successfully engage in the democracy of civil discourse. Nothing could be more satisfying than this.

