

An Introduction to
Community Heart&Soul®

**Building Stronger,
Healthier & More
Vibrant Towns**



Who says there's nothing to do in Galesburg, Illinois? As part of Galesburg's Community Heart & Soul project, residents were asked to jot down free things to do in town and filled this blackboard with ideas. Image: Jay Redfern/The Register-Mail

Your Town is Not Just a Place. It's Home.

Your town's unique character, along with the deep emotional connection felt by the people who live there, is your town's Heart & Soul.

Community Heart & Soul is a resident-driven catalyst for change that brings people and their elected officials together to build stronger, healthier, and more economically vibrant small cities and towns based on what matters most to everyone.

Community Heart & Soul is a step-by-step roadmap that guides residents in shaping the future of their communities.

Three principles guide the model:

Involve Everyone. Hearing from all residents, especially those whose voices are often missing or overlooked in community dialogue, is a priority throughout Community Heart & Soul.

Focus on What Matters Most.

When residents share what they love about where they live and identify their hopes for the future, common themes emerge. These are the things that matter most to residents and become the foundation for sound decision-making.

Play the Long Game.

Community Heart & Soul is just the beginning of an evolutionary way towns view themselves, how they govern, and how they make decisions about the future. Communities become equipped for the long run with the skills and tools to continue doing business guided by what matters most—their Heart & Soul.

What Matters Most for Your Home: Effects that Live on Long Term

Because Heart & Soul focuses on what matters most in your community, exactly how Heart & Soul takes effect in your town will be unique to the place you call home. Heart & Soul doesn't produce documents that live on a shelf, it produces effects that live on, long term...in the heartbeat of your community. As your town identifies and commits to What Matters Most to its residents, it channels energy to the things and priorities that matter most to those who live, work and play there. In this way, your town's Heart & Soul gives your town guidance for many years to come. Imagine what your residents can do when they're aligned and acting together!

We Believe in Your Community.

There is no question that the economies of small cities and towns have suffered the past few decades. Manufacturing, once the backbone of many local economies, has shrunk or disappeared. Tech, meanwhile, boomed, but in major metros, too far away to have an impact in much of the country.

We began to hear rural America described as “other America,” “fly over country,” and “left-behind,” connoting decay, despair, and depression. Pretty soon people were writing off the part of the country that comprises 97 percent of its geography and nearly 20 percent of its people.

I have always believed in small towns and the people who live in them. They know better than anyone what makes their towns special, how to restore resiliency, and thrive. I’ve seen this first-hand in the town where I grew up, Weston, Vermont, which has a population of less than 600, and where I was the third-generation to operate a general store and the seventh generation to call Vermont home. While serving on my town’s Planning Commission I observed people didn’t get involved in town planning until they were reacting to something controversial. This type of interaction created divides that took a long time to heal. I wondered if there could be a better

way to involve residents and draw on the many strengths of community that exist in close-knit towns. Community Heart & Soul evolved with this in mind.

We developed Community Heart & Soul to give residents and their elected officials a way to work together to make their places better. Now, towns across the country are discovering that by engaging everybody with the inclusive focus on elements all residents have in common, rather than focusing on issues that divide them, a town can come together to find its common “Heart & Soul” and use that as a foundation on which to make decisions.

We believe that most places have what they need to thrive, *if the people who live there take the time to discover what it is that makes their community special.* And that is our mission, to equip residents and their elected officials to more successfully shape the future of their communities. Because small cities and towns are one place residents can work together based on what they have in common.

Lyman Orton

Lyman Orton, Founder,
Orton Family Foundation



Community members in Community Heart & Soul town Gardiner, Maine, holding a banner featuring Gardiner's Heart & Soul logo. Image credit: Nancy Barron.



Why Community Heart & Soul?

Community Heart & Soul transforms towns because residents do the work, not the usual consultants or so-called stakeholders who produce well-intentioned plans that sit on shelves.

These plans fall short because they lack the kind of comprehensive community involvement that happens with Heart & Soul. Here are a few reasons Community Heart & Soul is not just another top-down effort that goes nowhere:

The approach is not cookie-cutter.

Community Heart & Soul is designed with the unique character of each community and the people who live there in mind.

The work is face-to-face. Community engagement, in the many forms that we encourage it, gets people out and meeting one another. As a result, relationships are built, new leaders emerge, and volunteerism grows.

Community Heart & Soul is data-driven. All of our community engagement, from story gathering to comments on sticky notes, generates data that is analyzed through our purpose-built system. That data provides a clear picture of what residents value most about their town.

Community Heart & Soul is action-oriented. And we start with connections. Connections lead to relationships and trust, which lead to sharing of experiences and ideas, which become the basis for actions that the entire community supports.

Transformation Comes from Doing Things Differently: Now & In the Future.

The work of Heart & Soul creates a new way of doing business together as neighbors, residents and elected officials. Your residents decide together what matters most and use it as the guide for action that becomes embedded in your town's future governance through plans like comprehensive plans, municipal budgets, zoning regulations and economic development work.

The skills, trust and relationships your town builds allows the principles of Heart & Soul to be incorporated into decisions about future opportunities and challenges. In these ways the transformation effects last well beyond the original people and work of Heart & Soul.

Five Ways Community Heart & Soul Transforms Towns

1. New leaders and volunteers emerge. Outreach and engagement reconnect residents. Participation increases.

In Gardiner, Maine, (pop. 5,700) city council meetings were characterized by a few angry residents showing up to yell and complain. When three seats opened on the city council, only two people ran.

Community Heart & Soul got residents reconnected to their local government. Eight people ran for three seats on the city council. Interest in serving on committees grew. More people attended council meetings, and the tenor of meetings changed as discourse became more civil. The mayor reported a hundredfold increase in active volunteers.

2. Trust is built. Finding common ground through Heart & Soul builds bridges.

In Cortez, Colorado, (pop. 9,000) city planners wanted to get more residents involved, especially those missing voices rarely heard. City officials began to think beyond city hall as the only place for public meetings. Using our Community Network Analysis, volunteers and planners went to people in their neighborhoods and sponsored block parties and potluck dinners. As plans for the future took shape, they went back to residents to check their work.

Community engagement helped planners do their jobs but also strengthened the bonds among neighbors based on a shared love of place and the desire to make it better.

3. Downtowns are reenergized. A thriving Main Street is a goal for nearly every community. Heart & Soul helps communities uncover possibilities that translate to transformation.

Biddeford, Maine, (pop. 21,000) was known as “Trash Town” because of the industrial garbage incinerator right downtown. But the facility provided 80 jobs and was the largest taxpayer in a town without a lot of options. Engagement activities during Biddeford’s Community Heart & Soul project made it clear that residents wanted the incinerator gone. That gave officials the backing they needed to buy the facility and close it. The move triggered major reinvestment with more than 90 new businesses and \$90 million invested in the first seven years after Heart & Soul, including a \$50 million boutique hotel and \$15 million in affordable housing.

Through Community Heart & Soul city officials in Biddeford, Maine, learned there was wide support for removing the incinerator that was downtown. After it was gone, the downtown saw major revitalization.



A potluck in Cortez, Colorado, hosted in and by the neighborhood, helped bridge divides between residents and city officials.





In McComb, Ohio, Community Heart & Soul helped restore a sense of pride.



Residents of Thomaston, Georgia, engage with Thomaston-Upson Community Heart & Soul at the annual Emancipation Day Celebration event. Community events provide a great venue for reaching and engaging residents. Image: King C. Davis

Five Ways Community Heart & Soul Transforms Towns (continued)

4. Pride is restored. One of the things residents notice, even early on, is how Community Heart & Soul restores a sense of pride among townspeople.

The Heart & Soul Team in McComb, Ohio, (pop. 1,600) started things off with a bang over the Fourth of July weekend. From the start, the team was on the move, reaching out to as many residents as possible, marching in the town's celebrated Cookie Festival parade, connecting with locals at the fire department chicken BBQ, and meeting fans at high school football games, among other events.

One resident observed a positive impact right away: "You know what I love about Heart & Soul? People feel they can be proud of McComb. I've already seen so much good. And it's just the start."

By asking people what they love about McComb, Heart & Soul got people thinking in terms of their town's assets and possibilities. This rekindled a sense of pride.

5. History and culture are honored. Community Heart & Soul helps towns rediscover the importance of history and culture in creating a town's unique character.

When residents tell their stories, the rich history of a place can be rediscovered or uncovered. That was the case in

Pennsylvania where the Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul Team heard from a resident about a long abandoned African-American church built by her grandfather circa 1870. The story rallied the community to protect and preserve the church along with the nearby cemetery, where her grandfather's gravesite is located along with several Civil War veterans. Now, the site is on the county's list of historic places and a door has been opened to dialog about the African-American history in the community.



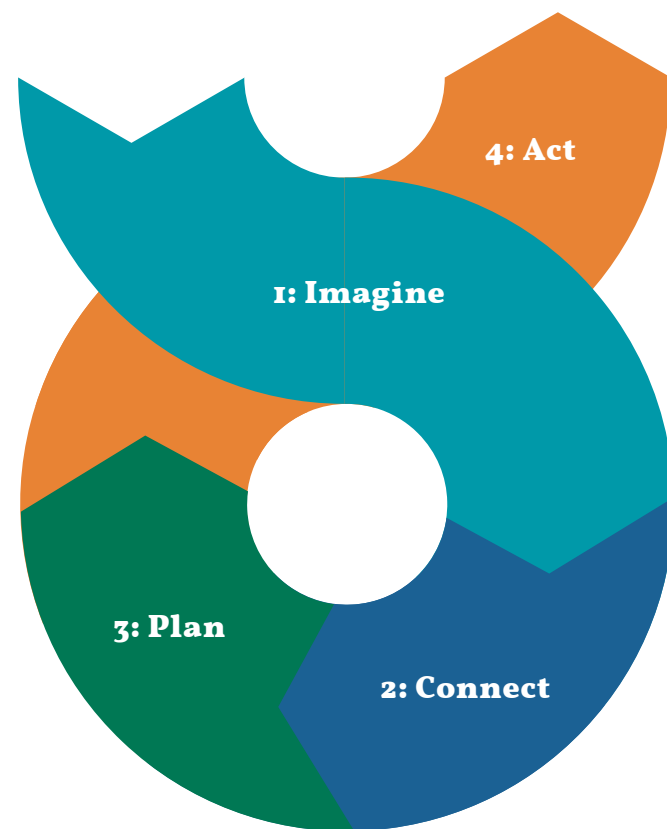
One woman's story, gathered as part of Community Heart & Soul, helped this Pennsylvania community discover an important piece of its past—an abandoned African-American church built by a former slave and Civil War veteran.

How Community Heart & Soul Works

Community Heart & Soul is a four phase, step-by-step process.

Developed and field-tested for more than a decade in partnership with small cities and towns (population less than 50,000), Community Heart & Soul has evolved into a proven method for bringing the community

together to chart a course forward. For most communities, completing the four phases takes about two years. But the completion of the Community Heart & Soul model is really just the beginning. It launches a new way of doing business that nurtures a more vibrant community far into the future.



“Our partnership with Orton to bring Community Heart & Soul to small towns in Hancock County has changed the way the Community Foundation does business in a powerful way by making our grant-making less transactional and more transformational.”

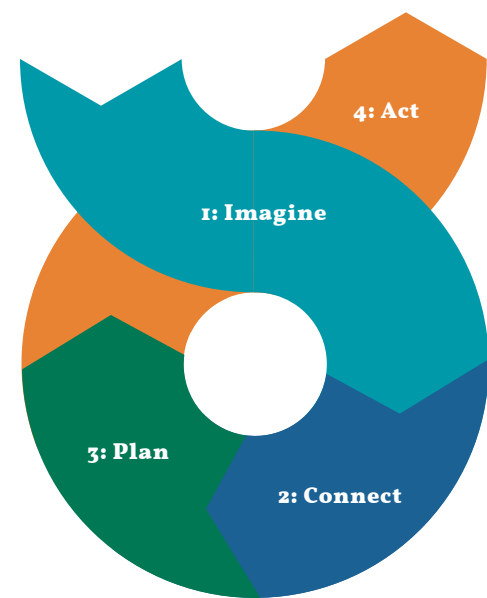
Julie Brown, former Program Director,
The Findlay-Hancock County Community Foundation,
Findlay, Ohio

Phase 1:

Imagine

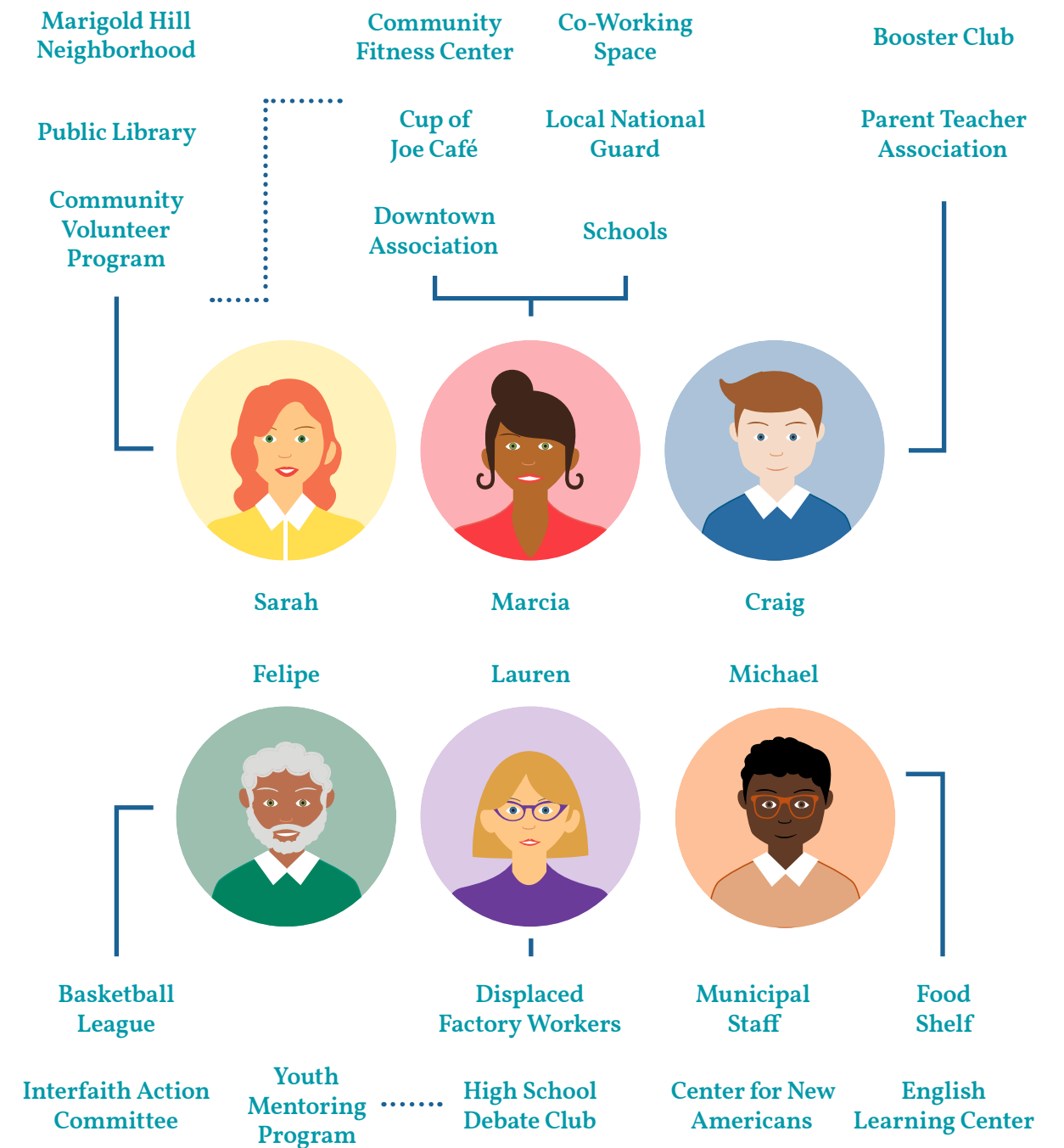
Build a team inspired to involve everyone, and create positive change.

- Establish a Heart & Soul Team that involves the community, set goals together.
- Build awareness, interest, and commitment in all segments of the community.
- Begin to examine who's in your community and how they are connected, and create a plan to reach them.



Community Network Analysis

Community Network Analysis is used as our guiding tool throughout Community Heart & Soul. Community Network Analysis is about understanding who lives, works, and plays in your community and how best to reach them. It begins by analyzing community demographics and tapping local knowledge to brainstorm ways to engage different groups and networks.

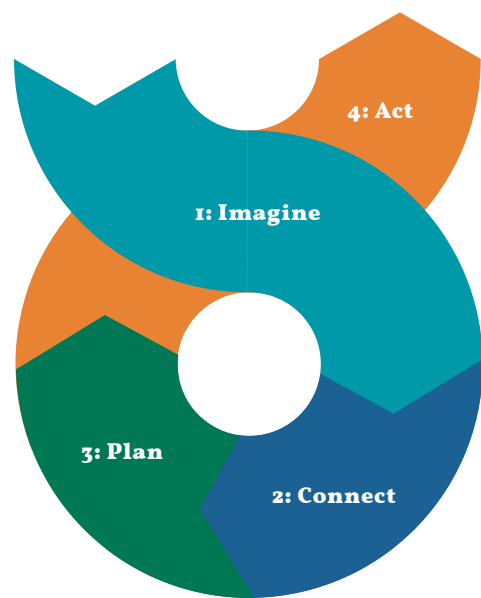


Phase 2:

Connect

Discover what residents love about where they live and identify common hopes and aspirations—what matters most.

- **Gather stories and input from the community.** Telling and sharing personal stories about local experiences is a key engagement strategy because it brings people together to find common ground.
- **Create Heart & Soul Statements that reflect the observations and aspirations of the entire community.** These will guide activities and results in phases that follow.



“We are creating successful economic development that pays tribute to where we came from. Without that base, we risk becoming ‘some revitalized city’ instead of an evolving Biddeford with culture and flavor and strengths that need to be maintained while adding the new.”

Delilah Poupore, Executive Director, Heart of Biddeford, Biddeford, Maine



Residents in Cascade, Iowa, turn out at Two Gingers Tavern for a Chamber of Commerce meeting to learn about the Cascade Heart & Soul Project. Meeting residents where they gather is a key aspect of Community Heart & Soul.

Phase 2: Connect

Community Engagement— Story Gathering and Beyond

Community Heart & Soul evolves around giving voice to everyone in a community, especially those whose voices are often missing at local meetings. Gathering stories, whether notes on a chalkboard or in-depth interviews, offers important data that reveals themes about what matters most to residents. These themes inform Heart & Soul Statements, which guide future decision-making based on what matters most to everyone.

Here are a few ideas to keep in mind when considering ways to reach everyone:

There is no such thing as the “general public.” Community Network Analysis is an important tool for getting to know who makes up your community and how they get information. This knowledge becomes the foundation for designing community engagement activities and communicating about your project in ways that reach everyone. Community Network Analysis is ongoing and revisited as the Heart & Soul Team gets a better understanding of who lives, works, and plays in the community.

Bring the table to the people. Rather than asking, “Who should be at the table?” think about where to bring the table. In other words, meet people where they are, and on their terms—in their neighborhood, at a holiday festival, before a football game, or at a block party.

Details matter. Consider ways to make an event easier to attend and more inclusive, such as child care, translators, transportation and, of course, food.

Make it fun! When you bring people together, think about how you can make the event a social opportunity, too.



Reaching people where they are is a key aspect of the “Involve Everyone” principle of Heart & Soul. In Paonia, Colorado, drink coasters were printed up that asked patrons to write up what they loved about the town and what they’d leave. The responses—insightful, entertaining, and creative—were posted on the wall of the establishment for all to see and provided important data about what was on the minds of residents.

Phase 2: Connect

Heart & Soul Statements

Here is a sampling of Heart & Soul Statements drawn from Community Heart & Soul towns across the country. These statements reflect themes that emerged from residents who shared what matters most to them about their towns.

Small Town Feel: We treasure our friendly community with its safe, close-knit family feel and the generational continuity that keeps our proud history alive; creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere for residents and visitors alike.

Vibrant Downtown: We treasure a vibrant downtown with small businesses, festivals, parades, waterfront, and art-related opportunities that provide economic development and places for people to gather; promoting a rich, welcoming sense of community.

Inclusion: We value a local community that celebrates and accepts all of the differences among individuals that keep our town vibrant and culturally beautiful.

Natural Resources: We value the natural beauty of the Mississippi River Valley. This environment bonds the community together, drawing in tourists and encouraging outdoor recreational activities.

Responsive Government: Our city government is responsive, approachable, good at listening, welcomes participation and involvement, is fair to all parts of the city and is accountable.

History: We value the physical infrastructure of our existing neighborhoods and downtown core...which together reflect the historic and distinct feel of our community to our unique sense of place.

Volunteerism: We treasure our volunteers... who help keep our community safe and support community and family.

Youth: We value our youth, empowering them to serve and grow through engaging activities and leadership opportunities to positively impact their future while building confidence and self-worth.

Safety: We will be a place where we can go anywhere at any time and feel safe.

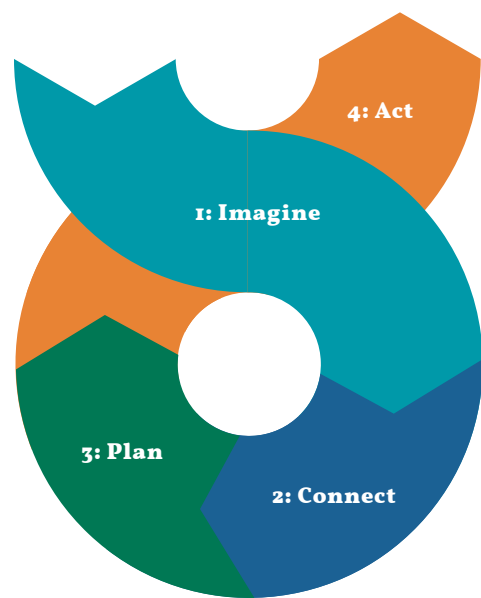


Phase 3:

Plan

Decide which ideas best reflect what matters most and create a plan that ensures action, both now and long term.

- **Prioritize action ideas to determine what is important to the community.**
- **Develop an Action Plan guided by Heart & Soul Statements that captures prioritized ideas.**
- **Revisit Community Network Analysis to ensure as many people as possible are included in decision-making, aiming for broad and meaningful participation in developing and evaluating options.**



“The power of Community Heart & Soul is that it created a critical mass of positivity that overcame old differences that had become obstacles in the community.”

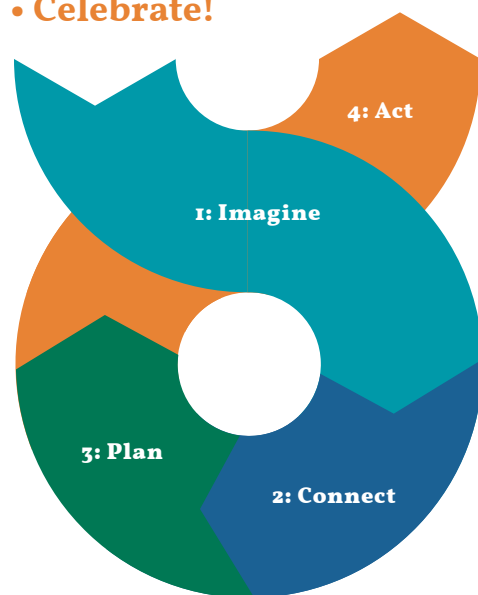
John Alden, Planning Commissioner, Essex Junction, Vermont.

Phase 4:

Act

Change the way the community takes action by putting resident engagement at the center of decision-making.

- Adoption of Heart & Soul Statements by city council; incorporation into comprehensive and other plans.
- Form a Stewardship Team to coordinate with community partners to make actions happen.
- Continue to apply the principles of Community Heart & Soul in future community endeavors.
- Celebrate!



In Bucksport, Maine, the Heart & Soul Team organized a Volunteer Fair & Summit that got organizations collaborating and paired volunteers with projects.

How 82 Ideas Became 82 Reasons for Collaboration

As Bucksport Heart & Soul in Maine completed Phase 4, team leaders wanted to get the ball rolling on 82 ideas for action prioritized by the community. Ideas ranged from creating a downtown beautification program, to holding block parties, to developing a farm-to-school program.

First, the team signed on organizations, soliciting support from the library, the chamber of commerce, the local land trust, the garden club, and so on. Next they held the Bucksport Heart & Soul Summit and Volunteer Fair. Sixteen organizations that had adopted one or more action items set up displays about their action ideas and signed-up volunteers on the spot.

The collaborative environment hatched additional creative ideas. For example,

encouraging reading and recreation were separate action items. These were combined into a storybook trail on the waterfront walking path. The local library led the project. Children moved from station to station reading pages from a storybook with exercise in between. In another example of collaboration and enthusiasm, the town's annual spring cleanup day grew from 30 volunteers to 400, in part thanks to a strong showing of nearly all the students from the local middle school.

"There's this new momentum. We can do things. We can take initiative. We can spin off ideas. These 82 ideas are really the jumping off point. These groups have a solid beginning of collaborating and it just keeps building," Project Coordinator Nancy Minott said.

Ready, Set, Get Started!

Community Heart & Soul is about rolling up your sleeves, getting active, and doing things. With that in mind, here are some things you can do to get going right away.

Get Inspired: Find a wealth of resources at our website that will allow you to start imagining the way your town could be transformed. Watch inspiring videos, read compelling case stories, and download our resources and guides that will help guide you to the things you'll need to get going!

Get Started: Download our “Getting Started with Heart & Soul” guide to find out how your community can begin building momentum and channeling resident energy.

Get Together: Get residents of your community (volunteers, elected officials, youth, etc.) together to see who might be willing to help and get engaged. Discuss what you think about Heart & Soul, what it might take to get started and share any and all resources you've gathered.

Get connected: Reach out to us at info@orton.org or call us at 802.495.0864. We'll be happy to help you with next steps. We can also connect you to our network of Heart and Soul communities, leaders, volunteers, coaches and partners who can share their experience and lend support. Who knows, one of them may be just down the road from you!

The point is, there's no better time to start than NOW. Let us know how we can help!

“The fabric of a community is built by its volunteers. By placing volunteers front and center, Community Heart & Soul has helped to weave the fabric of our community.”

Mike Bestor, former City Manager, Golden, Colorado.



Gardiner's Gardeners, a volunteer group in Gardiner, Maine, place flowers in a planter downtown. Beautifying the downtown was one priority that emerged from the Community Heart & Soul project there, and is an example of a low cost, high visibility project that contributed to revitalization.



Heart & Soul helps leaders emerge in your town. Oftentimes, these leaders come from the younger residents in your town who help you focus not just on today, but well into the future.

— Community —
Heart & Soul[®]

“If you really want to take an in-depth look at what matters to the members of your community and create a stronger, more cohesive community, Heart & Soul is the way to go.”

Thom Harnett, Mayor, Gardiner, Maine

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Front and back cover image: Artist John Bakker captured the Heart & Soul of Galesburg, Illinois, (pop. 31,000) in this series of portraits he painted in 2016.

