“Quality of Life in Morehead, Rowan County, Kentucky”

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ATP project date:

Date this document was submitted:
April 4, 2011

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Final Report Narrative

Name of Project: Quality of Life in Morehead, Rowan County, Kentucky

Grant Period: January 1, 2010 – June 30, 2010

Grantee Name: Morehead State University
Project Director: Dr. Christine McMichael

Description of Project:
In cooperation with the ongoing NewCity Morehead-Rowan County Project, students focused on helping the group and the community move towards their expressed goals of improving economic conditions and quality of life. Towards this end, students combined qualitative and quantitative research approaches in an attempt to better understand and document the “quality of life” for a group of carefully selected Kentucky counties, including Rowan County, experiencing a range of economic conditions. Relationships between quality of life indicators (utilities, public safety, health and healthcare, and education) and economic condition (distressed status) were examined for all five study counties. Results suggested that measures related to utilities (home heating fuel type), safety (police employment), and education (attainment rates) generally appeared to be higher in counties with greater economic success; other quality of life measures did not correspond as closely as we expected to the overall degree of economic success of our study counties. Recommendations were made regarding assessing community quality of life going forward – with a view to using such measures to help promote sound and sustainable decision making and policy development.

Activities:
Through their ATP project students learned about the history and development of Appalachia, their own community, and a number of neighboring communities. They met with local leadership to identify key quality of life indicators/ measures, undertook an applied research project that supported the efforts of the community as it endeavors to improve its quality of life, and shared their results with a variety of audiences (see below).

Project Outcomes:
- Research Report/Recommendations
- Poster Presentations
  - School of Public Affairs, Morehead State University
  - ARC Appalachian Teaching Project meeting in Washington, DC
  - Celebration of Student Scholarship, Morehead State University
- PowerPoint Presentations
  - School of Public Affairs, Morehead State University
  - ARC Appalachian Teaching Project meeting in Washington, DC
  - NewCity Morehead (Rowan County)
Problems Encountered:
The only issue was related to the time constraints of the project, which limited the scope of the study.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:
Strong relationships have been established and maintained with local and regional leadership as a result of the ATP projects that students at MSU have undertaken in this and previous years. Results of our projects have been welcomed and embraced by, e.g., the NewCity Morehead (Rowan County) group as it attempts to transform Morehead and Rowan County for the future. For the past few years ATP student projects at Morehead State University have focused on better understanding what factors contribute to community quality of life and economic development in eastern Kentucky, with a specific focus on Morehead-Rowan County. While several factors have been identified in the literature and through our prior research, we still do not have a clear answer to the question “Why is this area so persistently distressed?” Consequently, the upcoming year’s student ATP project (fall 2011) proposes to continue to work with these groups to refine our understanding of this problem.

Conclusions and Recommendations:
While the factors examined in this study were very likely impacted by economic prosperity to a significant degree, our findings show that there would seem to be a non-economic component at work as well -- at least for the five counties that we examined. That is, there would appear to be factors at work other than the wealth or poverty of the community, such as good leadership. It would seem, then, that if overall quality of life is an important goal for a community, then the community ought to take a multifaceted approach instead of focusing exclusively upon economic development.

As previously mentioned, this study only analyzed 14 of the 97 quality of life measures that we initially identified. Hence, there is more work that can be done with regard to gathering data and performing analysis on additional measures. Moreover, it may be useful to measure quality of life across regions instead of counties in our state. The fairly small size of Kentucky’s 120 counties makes it difficult to measure community development when the factors being assessed may be influenced by, not just a single county, but by a constellation of counties in a region. For example, some of our quality of life measures such as crime, transportation, employment, and housing may have been more reflective of regional conditions as opposed to county ones.

Attachments: N/A