“Community Development Data Needs in Morehead-Rowan County, Kentucky”

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Final Report Narrative

Name of Project: Community Development Data Needs in Morehead-Rowan County, Kentucky

Grant Period: February 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012

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

Description of Project:
Our Community Indicators Project (CIP) focused on improving our understanding of the factors contributing to quality of life and economic progress in our local community of Morehead-Rowan County in eastern Kentucky. Supported by information derived from the scholarly literature, the NewCity Morehead Report and over 16 real-world CIPs in other communities, we engaged in a rigorous process of identifying and selecting a set of meaningful indicators for our community. This list was reviewed and discussed with our community partner, NewCity Morehead, and we received positive feedback, further validating our work. We then worked to collect and analyze indicator data that they need to help them understand and improve the community’s economic condition and quality of life. Within the time constraints of this semester-long project, we collected baseline datasets for 16 of our 85 indicators and produced a well-organized, informative, and appealing CIP report to share with the NewCity Morehead group and the wider community.

The Community Indicator Project that we initiated this year was informed by results from ATP student projects carried out at Morehead State University over the past 4 years - and it will be continued by future ATP classes at MSU for years to come. Thus, this Community Indicator Project serves as the foundation for a longer-term initiative to collect and make available information that is useful to area citizens and community leaders as they work toward their shared long-term objectives for building a more sustainable community. As such, it is our hope that this work will eventually help us to understand better, and to explain, the persistent distress experienced in both our local community and the larger Appalachian eastern Kentucky region - and to identify what can be done to alleviate it and to enhance quality of life.

Activities:
Through their ATP project students learned about the history and development of Appalachia and their own community. They reviewed the scholarly literature and surveyed local leaders (NewCity Morehead) to help identify 85 important community indicators in a variety of categories (e.g., Demographics, Environment, Safety, Health, and Education), undertook an applied research project that gathered data on 16 of these indicators, and developed a Community Indicators Project report, all of which supported the community’s efforts to improve its quality of life. Finally, the students shared their results with a variety of audiences through presentations and discussions.

Project Outcomes:
- Research Report/Recommendations
- Poster Presentations
  o ARC Appalachian Teaching Project, Washington, DC (December 2011)
  o School of Public Affairs, Morehead State University (December 2011)
Problems Encountered:
The only issue was related to the time constraints of the project, which limited the scope of the study this semester.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:
Strong relationships have been established and maintained with local and regional leadership in Morehead and Rowan County 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 four 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?” The Community Indicator Project that we initiated this year will be continued by future ATP classes at MSU for years to come. It will serve as the foundation for a longer-term, collaborative initiative to collect and make available information that is useful to area citizens and community leaders as they work toward their shared long-term objectives for building a more sustainable community.

Conclusions and Recommendations:
Our class engaged in a rigorous process of identifying and selecting meaningful indicators for our community – recognizing that they must be individualized to the area being studied. We obtained positive community feedback on our proposed set of indicators, following which we collected some baseline indicator datasets. We also produced a 35-page Community Indicators Report for Morehead-Rowan County, Kentucky documenting our rationale, approach, baseline data, and recommendations for future work. In conclusion, we believe that the Community Indicators Project methodology is functional, constructive, and informative approach for better understanding community characteristics, change, and potential.

While we believe that our work this semester has established a solid foundation for a long-term project to gather and analyze indicator data for our local community of Morehead-Rowan County, we nonetheless have some suggestions that we think will enhance future ATP students’ work. First, additional indicator data should be collected at regular intervals – including developing a survey to obtain qualitative data on people’s perceptions and values. Second, report improvements could include augmenting the background material and refining the overall layout. Third, a publically accessible website for hosting the report itself, as well as other key information, might be developed and maintained. And fourth, enough flexibility should be incorporated into the CIP methodology going forward to respond to shifts in community needs and conditions, as well as changes in available funding, personnel, and data availability.

Attachments: N/A