

“Civic Mapping and Community Development in McKean County, PA”

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January 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011

**Proposal submitted: September 28, 2010
Final report submitted: January 27, 2011**

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Final Report Narrative

Name of Project: Civic Mapping in McKean County, PA Grant Period: January 1, 2010 – June 30, 2010

Grantee Name: University of Pittsburgh at Bradford Project Director: Dr. William Schumann

Description of Project:

This project was designed to develop baseline of information about and broadening UPB's engagement with sustainable community development in the McKean County area. This 'civic mapping' project was designed to train students in research methods, community outreach, participatory learning, and leadership development by exposing them to opportunities to individually interact with area community development agencies. Facilitated through an "Appalachian Culture and Sustainability" course taught fall 2010 (ANTH 1455; Instructor: Dr. William R. Schumann), students administered a standardized questionnaire for the purpose of identifying the 'trends toward sustainability' and 'challenges to sustainability' of each participating organization. The goal was to collect data that would enable longer-term, deeper connections with community development agencies in McKean County. This information was to additionally promote partnership opportunities across UPB's academic divisions and offices to widen university outreach and service to the Appalachian region of Pennsylvania.

Project Goals/Objectives:

1. Educate students about the challenges and opportunities for community development in McKean County, PA.
2. Identify potential campus-community partnerships with organizations engaged in community development within McKean County, PA.
3. Assess the resources available to and challenges faced by individual community development organizations in McKean County through site visits and administration of a 'civic capacity' questionnaire.
4. Train students to develop assessment tools (i.e., questionnaire) to gauge the 'civic capacity' of individual community development organizations.
5. Train students to present their research project and administer questionnaires to community development organizations.
6. Train students to present their research results to wider audiences.
7. Develop cross-university and cross-agency partnerships that contribute to the sustainability of McKean County, PA.

Project Activities and Outcomes:

- I. Research design, outreach, and student preparation for leadership
 1. Instructor conducted research methods workshops about questionnaire design; instructor conducted interpersonal communication and interviewing workshops with students to prepare them to meet with community development agencies on a one-on-one basis.

2. In conjunction with university speech and communications faculty, instructor conducted presentation workshops with students to prepare them to present their work in a professional, accessible manner.
3. Students developed and implemented a questionnaire to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and collaborative opportunities of McKean County community development agencies.
4. Seventeen agencies were ultimately interviewed by students.
5. Students divided into working groups to collate data, write a research presentation, create a professional research poster, and develop a related power point presentation.
6. Eight students from the course attended ATP meeting in Washington, D.C.
7. The entire class led a second research presentation for community agencies and UPB faculty and staff on December 15, 2010.
8. The partnership initiative and the ATP project were covered in local print media and were promoted across campus.

II. Research results

Key research results included:

1. A majority (60%) of agencies have operated for twenty years or more.
2. A majority (70%) of agencies operate by combining paid and volunteer labor; only 10% operate exclusively by virtue of volunteerism.
3. The most commonly shared goals of agencies were public education (26%), supplying community services (22%), and building networks of community support (18%).
4. By far the biggest challenges to sustainability faced by these agencies were shortages in funding (34%) and staffing (31%); technical/logistical support (11%) and political 'red tape' (8%) were also important factors.

III. Campus-community partnerships

On December 15, 2010, students from the Appalachian Culture and Sustainability course at UPB held a community development open house for community development agencies in McKean County and faculty and staff from UPB. Seven of the seventeen agencies originally interviewed were in attendance (two more agencies cancelled at the last minute due to bad weather). UPB was represented by the University Dean, the Associate Dean of Students, the Directors of UPB's Environmental Studies and Human Relations Programs, and the new Director of the Office of Continuing Education and Regional Development. The students presented their research poster and a revised version of their ATP power point presentation, including the data in section II (above), which was followed by a student-led round table discussion about identifying specific projects UPB can get involved with in the community. Partnerships that have already developed from this meeting include:

1. Students in a State and Local Government class (spr. 2011) are conducting community needs assessment surveys on behalf of the local branch of Pennsylvania's Office of Economic and Community Development.
2. Students in an Economic Anthropology class (summer 2011) will partner with an area food kitchen to provide community service in the context of learning about culture and economics.
3. Two student internships have been created for summer 2011: one in sustainable agriculture and another with the nearby Allegheny National Forest.
4. Students in the next Appalachian Culture and Sustainability course (fall 2011) will work the Allegheny National Forest Visitors Bureau to help meet the economic development goals of the agency's strategic plan.

Problems Encountered:

Thanks to excellent student commitment, administrative support, and cross-faculty collaboration, the scale of this project's initial success has proven to be its only "problem." Specifically, there are presently more potential community development partners than faculty interested and/or aware of partnership opportunities. While the bridge-building work in the community was assumed to be a natural challenge, it is now clear that UPB faculty would benefit from workshops that expose them to the concepts of service-learning and the specific opportunities available for this type of work in the McKean County area. As fortune would have it, however, UPB has recently hired a service-learning coordinator who is eager to build on the work of the students from the Appalachian Culture and Sustainability course.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

The campus-community partnerships (section III above) are an early indication of the positive benefit this project has already had on promoting regional sustainability through collaborative research. The next stage of this process is to (1) develop a steady stream of more intensive, one-on-one projects with individual agencies that would benefit from a temporary increase in human resources, and (2) encourage broad faculty engagement in this work so that several community partners can benefit from UPB services at any given time. Following a participatory research methodology and the development objectives of the Appalachian Regional Commission, future projects will be evaluated in terms of their ability to advance the mission goals of individual agencies in ways that can have direct and indirect impacts on the availability of sustainable jobs in a region rich in natural resources.

It is hoped that this project will also be sustained by the nature of the ATP project at UPB. While Dr. William Schumann will serve as liaison between UPB and the ATP, the ATP project is being promoted on campus as a non-propriety opportunity for all faculty members to engage in applied research in Appalachia. Therefore, it is expected that a diversity of faculty skills and approaches to sustainability will also shape the continuation of this process.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

In conclusion, this project was a great success both on and off campus. To paraphrase one agency representative who attended second student presentation (i.e., held on UPB's campus), it was the first time the university responded to her many requests to develop partnerships with her agency. Not only were meaningful partnerships developed for future collaboration, but the students who participated in the project and course have demonstrated a remarkable 'self-starter' mentality about advancing sustainability in the region outside of the classroom curriculum. Thus, the early signs are positive about encouraging leadership development among students through applied research in Appalachia. Recommendations for the future include:

1. As stated above, the key lesson to be taken from the research process is that UPB faculty should be better informed about partnership opportunities and strategies for integrating applied research into existing and/or new courses. An annual or bi-annual 'applied research lunch' is currently being discussed as an option within UPB's Behavioral and Social Science Division.

2. Based on feedback from the Dec. 15 meeting (see above), UPB will develop a community development agency list-serve to enable agencies to exchange ideas and UPB faculty to identify suitable partners and projects for future campus-community collaborations.
3. Following the suggestions of students involved in this project, it is recommended that a student club be started that focuses on service learning and sustainability issues in Appalachia. Another option to be investigated is merging these goals and activities within an existing, relevant student club to avoid diluting students' efforts.
4. Dr. Schumann will serve as an internship coordinator to identify and/or develop appropriate career-building learning opportunities for students to work with community development agencies.
5. Develop a strategic plan of community engagement that sets goals for the number and type of partnerships UPB engages in the next five years. An important factor is creating a balance between one-on-one student internships, classroom and club-based outreach/service learning projects, and applied research efforts that directly contribute to meeting the mission goals of agencies pursuing economic and environmental sustainability.

Attachments:

n/a