Being an Effective Change Agent: Leading Communities

By Kristina Ricketts, CEDIK Extension Specialist and Associate Professor, Community and Leadership Development

Leadership. It’s important to businesses, organizations, non-profits… and especially within communities. Communities are where we live, work and play, so it shouldn’t be any surprise we continue to try and improve the quality of life within our communities. Two initiatives recently introduced in Kentucky are designed to do just that—help improve the quality of peoples’ lives.

Improvement implies change, and for real community change to occur, we need to have someone leading the charge. A change agent can essentially be defined as “someone who acts as a catalyst for change.” History tells us that community initiatives with an individual (or group) pushing the boundaries of what can be done tend to move through the change process faster, with a lot more “buy-in” from community members.

Two innovative change programs recently introduced within Kentucky are Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) and the Promise Zone Initiative.

SOAR is a grassroots collaboration between public and private sector organizations seeking to improve the overall economy and quality of life for those in Kentucky’s Appalachian region. Working groups within the contexts of tourism, education, health care, business recruitment and agriculture are meeting to brainstorm innovative ideas that address issues within their area.

The Promise Zone Initiative, introduced by President Obama, seeks to encourage collaboration between local communities and businesses to improve the quality of life in chosen areas. Specific goals include creating jobs, increasing economic security, and expanding educational opportunities.

Each of these programs is designed to address issues important to Kentucky’s future. But while the individuals spearheading these initiatives have content knowledge,
FROM THE DIRECTOR...

This has been one busy summer! I had the honor and privilege of becoming the 10th NACDEP (National Association for Community Development Extension Professionals) President this year. I thought we had a wonderful conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan in June. There was record Kentucky participation. We had eight Cooperative Extension Agents and eight CEDIK state level faculty and staff. This year’s conference focused on the “Art of Reinvention”, and Grand Rapids was certainly a wonderful place to showcase what they have accomplished over the last decade to turn the city from what was once classified as a “dying city” to one that is now one of the “top places for families to visit.”

My goal as the Director of CEDIK is to create a culture in Kentucky that embraces community and economic development as a priority both within Cooperative Extension as well as within all of our counties and cities. Creating strong communities hinges on building upon the community capitals framework (human, built, financial, political, cultural, social and natural) locally and regionally. We have an absolutely wonderful group of State Extension Specialists including our newest addition, Dan Kahl. Dan is a new faculty member in Community and Leadership Development. He moved to UK from Kansas State University where he built a strong extension program. We are thrilled to have Dan join CEDIK and excited for the new opportunities ahead. You will certainly be seeing and hearing more from Dan over the next year.

CEDIK is celebrating its 4th anniversary this August. In our four years we have grown in people and in programmatic expertise. While many of us have taken a much needed vacation this summer, we are as eager as ever to serve the needs of Kentucky. Please don’t hesitate to contact us with any new exciting ideas or even some new challenges you need help with!

Alison

CEDIK Welcomes Dan Kahl

CEDIK is very pleased to welcome our newest member, Dan Kahl. Dan is an Assistant Professor in Community and Leadership Development, and he is looking forward to meeting agents across the state. He has 16 years of experience in leadership programming and working with citizens to engage the public in community betterment activities.

His work involves designing programs to enhance public participation and to identify and address public issues. He is also an experienced trainer of facilitation and community coaching.

You can reach Dan by phone at 859-257-2542 or by email: daniel.kahl@uky.edu.
what about knowledge of the process of leadership? Who takes on the role as change agents? And finally - what are the specific characteristics a leader exhibits when operating as an effective change agent? While leadership comes in all shapes and forms, it can be argued that when discussing initiatives where change is essential (such as SOAR and the Promise Zone), there are certain leadership characteristics that are particularly important. These characteristics encourage action, and ultimately set up the program and leader for success:

1. **Visionary** - While a change agent doesn’t necessarily have to be the person in authority, he or she does need to have a clear vision, and articulate it clearly to others. Ambiguity, defined as a lack of clarity or being “all over the place” frustrates community members, who will ultimately disengage from the entire process. It should be noted that a clear vision reflects a common purpose, not just one way to do things. The most effective change agent will be able to work with community member strengths, and show there are many ways to reach the overall vision.

2. **Patient (yet persistent)** - Change can be a long process, especially when the change is meant to be meaningful and sustainable. Community members often get frustrated when change doesn’t happen fast enough, and their frustration may push them further away from the vision. As a change agent, persistence is necessary when helping people to move forward as they are ready. Moving people from “Point A to Point B” is the goal - and not everyone will move at the same pace. A change agent just makes sure everyone is moving forward.

3. **Questioning (asks tough questions)** - it is much easier for someone to come into a community and tell you how things should be - but that isn’t the community’s solution. If the solution is someone else’s, then there is no buy-in or accountability. When individuals feel an emotional connection to something, they are more likely to move ahead. Asking questions that focus on “What is best for the community?” or “What is best for (a specific community group)?” assists people in coming to their own conclusions, which will help them have ownership in what they are doing.

4. **Knowledgeable and leads by example** - effective change agents must not only be seen as good people (character and credibility), but also as knowledgeable about what they are talking about (content knowledge). Too often we see people within leadership or administrative positions who have lost touch with what in happening at the grassroots level. Someone who stays active in learning and working at the community level will retain much more credibility when moving through the change process. The bottom line is this - if you want to create change, you need to be able to articulate what it looks like, as well as demonstrate it to others.

5. **Relationship-oriented (develops strong relationships built on trust)** - none of the above aspects mean anything without having strong relationships with the community members and stakeholders that you serve. Community members need to trust the person who is pushing the change. Effective change agents should be reliable and approachable - no one should ever be afraid to approach an individual based on authority or a “title.” Still, successful change agents aren’t afraid to have tough conversations; trust is also built when community members know you will deal with things and not be afraid to do what is right, even when difficult. Often, trust can be established when community members see you doing what is right for the community.

(Story continued on page 5)
WOUNDED WARRIOR VICTORY GARDEN  
FORT KNOX, KY

Fort Knox Army Reservation is home to the Wounded Warrior Battalion. Additionally, Ireland Army Hospital provides physical and mental treatment to active military service personnel. Brain Injury Alliance contacted John Hancock, Project Manager for University of Kentucky’s AgrAbility, to develop an area where these active members of U.S. Military Service could benefit from gardening, which has been shown to assist with mental and physical therapy. Mr. Hancock asked Darold Akridge, Bullitt County Agriculture and Natural Resource Agent, to become involved due to his work in establishing an enabling garden on grounds at his office. Additionally, Carol Faulkner, Kentucky State University Small Farm Assistant, has joined the team.

Last year the contract was not secured until July. Even with such a late start date, Hancock utilized his personal tractor and PTO tiller to break ground for the garden. He also secured plants from the UK Horticulture Club at a reduced rate for the garden. Akridge asked three Bullitt County organizations to participate in funding the project. Each group immediately responded with financial support (Bullitt County Farm Bureau - $400, Bullitt County Ag Council - $1,500 and Bullitt County Extension - $2,500). These funds were used to purchase everything from tools and supplies to amenities (such as seed money for a structure to house the tools and shade for the soldier gardeners to rest). Faulkner also used funds from Kentucky State University (KSU) to purchase material to create six raised beds (4’x8’x3’). When the lumber arrived, soldiers and cooperators pitched in to complete the construction.

Last fall Akridge secured two tri-axle loads of topsoil for the raised beds. This spring, Hancock again took his equipment to break the ground and fill the raised beds from the donated topsoil. Four plots have already begun this year. A Bullitt County resident and heritage tomato producer has donated full-size and cherry tomatoes to start the gardens. Hancock is in the process of securing a wide variety of gardening plants for the project. A beehive has also been placed on grounds by Carl Jackson, a bee keeper in southeast Kentucky, and

Agent Spotlight: Darold Akridge, Bullitt County Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources
Laura Rogers of KSU. Last year one of the soldiers made the comment, “I had never raised a garden before this. It is really nice to have my own garden.” The grin on his face told how he felt without him saying a word. When a gardener had to be out for extensive surgery/treatment the others would pitch in to care for that plot until he was able to return and garden.

Some may recall that the Federal Government was placed on furlough due to a lack of budget passage. One unexpected result of the garden, with its short season last year, was that the soldier/gardeners provided some of their harvest to Federal workers that were on furlough. It was a healthy win-win for soldiers and civilians. The project continues to grow as new growth in the early spring. Everyone involved continues to seek ways to become more involved. Akridge will take the Bullitt East Chapter of FFA to visit the garden this July to see how they might participate as partners as well.

For more information about Extension Programming in Bullitt County please contact:

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BEING AN EFFECTIVE CHANGE AGENT: LEADING COMMUNITIES, CONTINUED

Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

It may be as simple a finding a person to serve as the catalyst for change. A change agent serves this purpose - but change can’t happen without demonstrating the right leadership characteristics.

Innovative change programs such as SOAR and the Promise Zone Initiative are set up to make great differences and improve the quality of life within their communities, but this can’t happen without an effective change agent at the helm. These same characteristics would apply when operating as a change agent within your own community. So the question remains - are you serving as an effective change agent?

References


CEDIK Research Update

By James Allen, CEDIK Research Director

It has been almost a year since the last update of CEDIK’s research efforts, and much has happened in that time! One article has been published, another is in publication, and we have made significant progress on several projects discussed in previous newsletters.

The first article, “Resident Valuation of Kentucky’s Extension Fine Arts Program,” estimates the value of the Kentucky Extension Fine Arts (EFA) Program, which began in 2005 and was featured in the last newsletter. While controlling for several factors, we found that residents were more likely to support a tax increase to enhance their county’s EFA Program if residents were aware that their county employed an EFA agent and/or participated in EFA programming. This suggests that county residents are not indifferent to their county’s EFA programs, but in fact, value their contribution to the community. We hope this finding encourages other state Extension programs to consider EFA programs. The article was recently published in the *Journal of Extension* and is available online for free:


Please share with extension agents and administrators!

The second article, “Residents’ Willingness-to-Pay for Attributes of Rural Health Care Facilities,” estimates the willingness-to-pay for specific attributes of health care facilities in rural Kentucky in order to determine which services and operational characteristics are most valued by local residents. We found that acceptance of Medicaid/Medicare with a sliding fee scale versus only private insurance was the most valued attribute. Presence of full diagnostic services, an emergency room, and 24-hour / 7-day-per-week access were also highly valued. Conversely, the presence of specialized care—such as physical therapy, cancer care, or dialysis—was not valued.

In total, respondents were willing to pay $225 more annually to support a hospital relative to a rural health clinic. The article has been accepted to and will soon be published in the *Journal of Rural Health*.

We have also made progress on CEDIK’s larger studies. Data has been collected for the Kentucky Entrepreneurship Survey, which now has over 1,400 responses from 78 Kentucky counties. In the coming months, we will analyze the survey results in order to determine what makes an entrepreneur successful in Kentucky. In addition, CEDIK graduate student Shaheer Burney had the opportunity to present a paper that uses this new data at the American Agricultural Economics Association meetings in July, which was great experience for him and good publicity for CEDIK’s research efforts. Also, we have nearly completed an evaluation of over 200 health projects implemented by the Appalachian Regional Commission in the past decade. The evaluation included a detailed analysis and 13 in-depth case studies and will be made public in a few months once the final edits have been made.

Over the summer, we will also continue work on CEDIK’s series of County Data Profiles. We are working to create an Education Profile that showcases county-level data on educational enrollment and attainment as well as a breakdown of the education sector in the local economy. Once completed, this seventh profile will add to
Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) Grant Workshop

The Kentucky Office of Rural Health is hosting a grant workshop to educate rural health care providers and advocates about ORHP’s community–based primary care services. These funding opportunities include the Rural Health Care Services Outreach, Rural Health Network Development Planning, and Rural Health Network Development grants. The workshop will also encourage community organizations to apply for these funds and will increase organizational capacity to secure future grants made available through ORHP.

**When:** September 4th, 2014

**Where:** Clark County Cooperative Extension Service, 1400 Fortune Drive, Winchester, KY 40391

**Cost:** $25, non refundable

**Registration Deadline:** August 28th. Registration form can be found here: 
[https://research.med.uky.edu/sites/default/files/ORHP%20Grant%20Workshop%20Flyer.pdf](https://research.med.uky.edu/sites/default/files/ORHP%20Grant%20Workshop%20Flyer.pdf)

For more information or to register, contact Kayla Combs at Kayla.combs2@uky.edu or by calling 606-439-3557 or Alice Combs at alice.combs@uky.edu or by calling 606-439-3557.
Upcoming Events & Important Dates

2014 Midwest Community Development Institute
August 11-14, 2014
Moline, IL
http://www.midwestcdi.org/

The Midwest Community Development Institute (CDI) provides top-notch training for development professionals, community leaders, and public officials, anyone who is actively engaged in building a vibrant and better community. We strive to make the training fun, interactive, and practical, so that it can be immediately applied when participants return home.

Slow Money Conference
November 10-12, 2014
Louisville, KY
http://slowmoney.org/national-gathering/2014/home

A local and global gathering on food, investing, and culture. Since our inaugural national event in 2009, Slow Money gatherings have emerged as a significant new venue for field building, investing, and social change. The events feature food entrepreneurs who are leading the way rebuilding local food systems, along with many renowned thought leaders in agriculture, investing, and philanthropy.

Conference for Community Arts Education
November 19-22, 2014
Los Angeles, CA
http://communityartsed.nationalguild.org

This conference will bring together more than 500 arts education leaders from 350+ arts and cultural centers, community arts schools, preparatory programs, performing arts companies, museums, and other agencies nationwide. Join this dynamic learning community of staff, faculty, trustees, and teaching artists to forge the future of arts education in America, develop new skills, and build relationships.

CEDIK QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Dedicated to building Kentucky communities with a true sense of pride and place, rich natural and built amenities, and a strong economic base.

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