

**LOW RESOURCES IN A HIGH STAKES GAME:
IDENTIFYING VIABLE RURAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

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Cooperative Extension resources are shrinking, yet rural community leadership needs are great, and, the consequences of not addressing them are dire. This presentation links community capital theory with community survival indicators, and provides 111 signs that identify viable partners. The Viable Community Partners Guide will be shared and input sought.

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Low Resources in a High Stakes Game: Identifying Viable Rural Community Partners

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Introduction

Higher education institutions are operating in an era of austerity. This austerity translates into challenges in adequately addressing institutional mission and demonstrating impacts. No place is that more of a challenge than in Cooperative Extension. The needs are great, and in some parts of the country the consequences of not addressing them are dire. Communities are disappearing as a result of the national trend of negative growth in rural counties (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

Regardless of these shifts in population, Cooperative Extension has a statewide programming mission to serve the educational needs of all citizens at all age levels. However, limited resources require tough choices in programming. High priority programs that produce the greatest impacts, and from an accountability standpoint, standup to public scrutiny, are valued (Bogue, 1998). From a community leadership perspective, it is often difficult to respond to all the community requests that are made of Extension faculty. Further, it is even more difficult to decide which of the potential community partners will benefit the most from an infusion of leadership programming. How can theory be used by Extension faculty to help prioritize requests for community leadership development?

The **objectives** of this presentation are to: 1) relate Flora and Flora's (2004) theory on community capitals with the Heartland Center's 20 Clues to Rural Community Survival (Luther & Wall, 1988); 2) establish an objective means of analyzing community viability; and 3) solicit feedback on the utility of the Viable Community Partners Guide.

Background

Flora and Flora (2004) have synthesized the literature on intangible and tangible capitals to assemble a comprehensive list of seven capitals. The intangible capitals include human, cultural, political, and social capital, while the tangible capitals include financial, built and natural capital.

The intangible capitals are the unseen assets that community members possess, both individually and corporately. *Human capital* consists of the knowledge, skills, and abilities of individual community members and how those individual assets can be invested into the community as a whole. *Cultural capital* includes the general values and attitudes held by a community, including the way they tend to approach life in general. *Political capital* is generally thought of as the amount of power a community has to determine the availability of resources and influence the distribution of those resources. *Social capital* is comprised of the social networks and the amount of collaboration found among community members as well as between communities. A key component of social capital is mutual trust.

The tangible capitals are the visible assets that a community possesses. *Financial capital* primarily consists of money that is used for investment into the community rather than for individual consumption. An important part of financial capital is its ability to be translated into other assets such as *built capital*. Built capital is comprised of the assets that have been constructed in and around the community. Roads, bridges, public services, and buildings are all part of a community's built capital. This provides a foundation for community development and growth. *Natural capital* includes the natural resources found in and around a community: landscape, water, flora, and fauna all are part of a community's natural capital.

In 1988, Luther and Wall published a book that reported the results of their case study research throughout the Midwest. They analyzed their case studies of towns to develop a list of 20 Clues to Rural Community Survival. The clues are helpful signs of community viability and can be used in a subjective manner to profile a community.

How It Works

Fifteen leadership education graduate students volunteered to participate in a group exercise. First, they reviewed Flora and Flora's (2004) community capitals and the 20 Clues to Rural Community Survival (Luther & Wall, 1988). They were then led through a group process to categorize the 20 Clues under the seven community capitals. Because of the broad application of some of the clues, participants were permitted to categorize the clues under more than one capital. Last, through the use of brainstorming, they identified specific indicators common to most rural communities across each of the 20 Clues.

Results to Date

Table 1 reports the results of integrating the community capitals and the 20 Clues to Rural Community Survival. Several clues were listed twice, and one clue ("Inclusive culture where women are seen in leadership roles") was listed three times. Nineteen clues were listed under the intangible capitals and ten clues were listed under the tangible capitals. Table 2 reports the brainstorming results, 111 examples were listed for the 20 Clues, or more than five examples, on average, for each clue.

Conclusions/Recommendations

It would appear that the 20 Clues for Rural Survival have a heavy focus on intangible community capitals. Future research is needed to determine the relative importance of one category (intangible, tangible) to the other in predicting community survival.

Linking theory to practice is an essential part of the Land Grant mission. This presentation seeks to link theory to practice for the purpose of not only developing

leadership in rural communities, but also helping identify where the greatest impact can be achieved for the greatest number.

Our efforts to move from the subjective, but helpful, 20 Clues to more objective indicators of community viability, are in the preliminary stages. However, we are looking to solicit input (and validation) from session participants in an effort to strengthen what we are now calling the Viable Community Partners Guide. Eventually, we hope to disseminate the guide to assist those who are trying to make rural community partner decisions. Additionally, we believe there is potential for sharing the guide with community leaders as a means of “auditing” their community’s health and potential.

References

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Table 1. Integration of Community Capitals with 20 Clues for Rural Community Survival.

Social	Cultural	Human	Political	Natural	Financial	Built
4. Collaborative decision making	2. Quality in business and community is a way of life	6. Realistic appraisal of community strengths	7. Awareness of community's strengths compared to competitors	8. Awareness of strengths of community's environment	3. Invest in the future	2. Quality in business and community is a way of life
5. Cooperative community spirit, working toward a common goal	5. Cooperative community spirit, working toward a common goal	10. Deliberate transition of power to younger generations	9. Active, organized approach to economic development		17. Thoughtful use of fiscal resources with focus on the future	6. Realistic appraisal of community strengths
9. Active, organized approach to economic development	11. Inclusive culture where women are seen in leadership roles	11. Inclusive culture where women are seen in leadership roles	11. Inclusive culture where women are seen in leadership roles			8. Awareness of strengths of community's environment
13. Problem solving approach to providing health-care	14. Inclusive culture where all generations are included in activities	20. Proactive in making community a good place to be	18. Access information beyond that found in community			12. Believe strongly in good schools and support for education
18. Access information beyond that found in community	15. Strong presence of traditional institutions in community life					13. Problem solving approach to providing health-care
19. Seek outside help such as grants and development contracts						15. Strong presence of traditional institutions in community life
						16. Maintenance and improvement of infrastructure a priority

Table 2. Viable Community Partners Guide: Community Examples of 20 Clues for Rural Community Survival

Abridged Clues							
1. Community pride	Local museum shows historical pride	Community festivals celebrate their heritage	Pride shown through decoration themes in community	Committee in charge community beautification	School parades	Thoughtful use of natural resources and care is given to environment	Clean streets, yards and parks
2. Emphasis on Quality in Business and Community Life	Presence of formal business organizations	A strong Chamber of Commerce maintains a city website	Classes are offered on business development and entrepreneurship	Presence of an active economic center	Presence of an active community center		
3. Invest in the future	Actively seeking new technology and resources	Local foundation for community development	Industrial park	Programs for youth development and engagement	Jobs for youth	Up-to-date educational system	Alliances with post secondary institutions
4. Participatory Approach to Community Decision Making	Focus groups and task forces are used	Presence of active civic groups	City Council meetings are open to all				
5. Cooperative Community Spirit	Presence of an active community center	Residents cooperate in community celebrations	Development of city improvement projects	Community members work concession stands at games	Strong public attendance at school games and activities		
6. Realistic Appraisal of Future Opportunities	Continuous and effective assessment of future jobs and growth	Strategic planning to optimize community strengths	Town has developed a mission statement which is visible in public	Continuous research in economic development			
7. Awareness of Competitive Positioning	Evidence of small town merchants	Awareness of niche markets which capitalize on strengths	Innovative entrepreneurship	Assessment of economic market and declines			

8. Knowledge of the Physical Environment	Tourism is promoted	Presence of community park	Organized town layout that attracts business	Assessment and improvement of infrastructure	Pictures of attractions and resources are used to advertise		
9. Active Economic Development Program	Paid community development professional	Presence of 'business incubator'	Planning is done with the region in mind	Active Chamber of Commerce			
10. Deliberate Transition of Power to Younger Generation of Leader	Presence of mentoring programs	Presence of youth involvement in local government	Entrepreneurship class offered in the high school	Service learning programs utilized to promote civic engagement	Youth civic groups are supported		
11. Acceptance of Women in Leadership	Women involved in local government	Women involved in law enforcement	Presence of female business owners	Presence of female elected officials	Women involved in educational administration	Women accepted as church leaders	
12. Strong Believe in and Support for Education:	Community support of good teachers	Community events held at the school	Strong attendance at parent/teacher conferences	Attendance of community at School Board meetings	Support by community for school fund raisers	Support for a property levy to help pay school costs	
13. Problem-solving Approach to Providing Health Care	Community-wide board is established to focus on health care	Certification opportunities for the community (CPR, first aid, etc)	A hospital or clinic is located in the community and has expert staff	Networking with specialists and special equipment (Cardiology machine comes to the community)	Allocating money to EMT, ambulance	Assisted living facility for elderly	
14. Strong Multigenerational Family Orientation	Adopt-a-Grandparent	Community celebrations passing on the traditions between generations	Intergenerational dialogues at the schools	Youth volunteers at nursing homes, etc	Volunteer Grandparents in businesses and the school	Family fun nights-with teams	Strong 4-H programs
15. Strong Presence of Traditional Institutions that are Integral to Community Life	Active community center	Support of school, involvement in local religious institution	Historical sites are celebrated and promoted	Businesses and entrepreneurship are promoted	Well-attended community dinners and social meetings		

16. Sound and Well-maintained infrastructure	Streets are improved regularly	Community budget allocates money to re-construction and town maintenance	Sidewalks and handicap accessible curbs	Continual upkeep of vacant buildings	Community wide clean-up and landscaping committees	Buildings are regularly repaired and kept up-to-date	
17. Careful Use of Fiscal Resources	Capable council treasurer	Budget planning sessions	Community fund is supported by residents	Public attendance at meetings on the budget	Strategic plans-five years	Balanced budget	
18. Sophisticated use of Information Resources	Internet service in households and schools	New computers in the schools	Community training on resource gathering and the internet	Networking with outside communities	International exchanges with similar communities		
19. Willingness to Seek Help from the Outside	Partnership with a university	Networking with outside health services	Exchange program with another state	4-H international exchange	International Sister Cities Program		
20. Convention that in the long run you have to do it yourself	Thriving grassroots networks	Presence of multigenerational businesses	Applications for grants are actively sought	Inclusive leadership style is adopted by community leaders			