Community Transformation
A Concept Paper for the West Virginia Community Collaborative
by Peter Hille, Director
Brushy Fork Institute of Berea College
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The concept of community transformation is intended to describe significant change in a distressed community that would be clearly measurable in terms of income, employment, educational attainment, human health, environmental quality, population retention, business environment, access to capital, entrepreneurial activity, accountable governance and civic participation. Robert Putnam and others have posited that the key to such transformation is social capital, the "networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."

Programs that address individual development, organizational development, and community development contribute to the accumulation of social capital. Although significant successes have been achieved in working with individuals and with organizations, we lack models of successful transformation of communities. We expect that such transformation would be the eventual outcome of a range of programs working with individuals and organizations in a community over time. However, this long-term cumulative effect has not been documented nor has it been attempted in a coherent systematic way.

To effect community transformation would require the concentrated application of a wide range of efforts in a given community over a period of time. They would need to attain a breadth and depth of penetration in the population in order to create a "critical mass" of social capital at which point the process should become self-sustaining. This would require a density of human resource development that has perhaps never before been attempted. It would involve the coordinated application of a wide range of different types of programs serving different segments of the population as well as bridging such sectors.

Such an effort would have to reach beyond the "usual suspects" who can be counted upon to turn out for public meetings and leadership programs. It would need to reach deep into the community with "entry level" programs for those who have never been involved before, whether due to socio-economic status, youth, or apathy. It would need "re-entry programs" for those who have participated before but dropped out, whether from age, burn-out, or alienation. It would need "advanced level" programs for people who have experience but need further training to become trainers themselves. It would require cooperation from government, schools, churches, the business community and community-based organizations. Perhaps most challengingly it would require everyone to give up the prospect of getting credit if the venture succeeds, and allow success to be its own reward.

Even beyond the point of critical mass, where the process of accumulating <u>social</u> capital became self sustaining, there would still be a need for significant other resources to be focussed on and funneled to the community. However, the direction of the effort

would be under continuously increasing community direction. The nature of the resources needed would also change as the process evolved. The process would likely begin with intensive human resource and organizational development, but would eventually require significant financial capital and physical infrastructure as well. The human resource investments on the front end would increase the likely profitability of subsequent financial investments.

It is daring to dream such dreams, but it is doom to accept poverty, disease, and injustice as insurmountable; to believe that some can prosper while many suffer; and to think that we will never pay a price. We may wait to pay our tab until the party is over, and find that we have mortgaged our souls while we danced. Better to open the doors of the dancehall now and learn a new tune that we can sing together. The party is just beginning.

Potential Steps for a Community Transformation Project

Phase one:
1. Identify community
2. Do baseline research
3. Identify existing resources and previous efforts
4. Identify core of local leaders and transformation process advocates

Phase two:
1. Initiate training for local core group
2. Conduct media campaign and public meetings led by core group to increase community awareness and involvement.
3. Core group develops and conducts high-profile community development project to generate early significant success.

Phase three:
1. Core group identifies target sectors of the local community in which involvement and leadership needs to be increased.
2. Programs and resources are accessed and/or developed to reach target sectors.
3. Leaders from target sector are added to core group.

Phase four:
1. Once the core group is large and diverse enough to be representative of the community, a community-wide visioning and planning process is conducted.
2. Local, state and federal resources are accessed to carry out the plan.
3. Data is collected over time to compare with baseline data.
4. Human resource development and other activities continue, adjusted as needed to continue to meet new and ongoing needs.