

The State Rural Development Council Movement: Challenges and Opportunities for the Academy and the Practice of Community Development¹

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Abstract: The State Rural Development Council (SRDC) movement is both a challenge, and an opportunity because of the very issues that state councils are confronting. These core issues are vital to the future of the nation's rural communities. This paper discusses three relevant issues in some detail with examples of what state councils do and how they function.

1. Introduction

The theme of the March 2001 symposium honoring Professor Ron Shaffer is concerned with the role of the *academy* and the *practice* of community development. This paper focuses on how the two may well connect for mutual benefit in the context of a national public policy experiment, called the "state rural development council" (SRDC) movement.² In the SRDC arena, challenges and opportunities abound for both the academy and the community development profession.

Why is this so? One major reason is the nature and purpose of the SRDCs as well as the policy rationale that first inspired the initiative;

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² As director of the National Rural Economic Development Institute at the University of Wisconsin, Professor Ron Shaffer played a decisive role in the establishment of the National Rural Development Partnership, which heralded the beginning of the SRDC movement. The latter is the longest public policy experiment to have survived for over a decade without ever having been written into federal statutes.

which by its many permutations, sustained it through the decade of the 1990s. Another is the nature of the SRDC process that has evolved experientially through the years to compel the council to become - or aspire to become - a learning organization, driven by ideas as well as values.

Born in 1990 as part of a national initiative on rural development, the SRDC movement was based on the need to rethink and reinvent how federal and state rural development policies were made and how programs were designed and delivered. This need was wide ranging. It related not only to shrinking public resources and the increasing complexity in the nature of the issues³ that rural communities face across the country, but also to a fundamental shifting, or re-conception, of the roles of government on national, state and local levels. The trend toward devolution called for different ways of doing the business of government, as well as public policy processes that were more collaborative and participatory.

The National Rural Development Partnership (NRDP), therefore, was predicated on certain basic principles about the nature of the rural policy process in this emerging new context, its appropriate purposes, and the ways to achieve desired outcomes.⁴ These fundamental principles included, for example:

- Broad representation and participation of interested and affected parties;
- Collaborative partnerships among federal, state, local, tribal governments, the private sector, and community-based organizations;
- Empowerment of local communities to solve local problems; and
- Policy and program flexibility and innovation.

State councils are now active in 40 states. The councils have developed strong support and involvement of federal agencies, state and local officials, business and community leaders, the National Governors Association, and public interest groups like the National Association of Counties. This broad base of support derives from a growing recognition that the challenges and opportunities of rural development require both *collaborative effort* and *strategic learning, thinking and action*.

At a time when rural development issues are growing more complex and the resources available to address those issues are shrinking, many individuals and organizations see the collaborative approach espoused by the SRDC movement as a potent force for change and innovation.

³ Issues faced by the nation's small towns and rural places are multiple; they include: fundamental restructuring of the economy; demographic shifts; diverse rural circumstances; distance and remoteness; wide ranging needs - from education and training to health and child care; fragmentation of programs and services.

⁴ For a discussion of the history and early results of the SRDC movement, see Shaffer (1994) and Buxbaum and Ho (1993).

2. Nature of the State Council - How It Works

In the beginning, there was a decidedly simplistic conception of the council process. The mantra was - *“Bring the stakeholders and the players to the table.” “Coordinate and cooperate!” “Undertake needs assessment jointly; develop a strategic plan; and move into implementation.”* Three months after the funding of the eight pilot state councils, the then USDA deputy undersecretary for rural development came to a meeting of the pilot states and gently chided the council executive directors for not having even begun to implement their state strategies!⁵

The University of Wisconsin’s National Rural Economic Development Institute provided the pilot state councils with a week of wonderfully content-rich and elegantly structured instruction. The week-long curriculum covered topics ranging from rural trends and conditions; to sectorial issues and prospects, to needs assessment, and to strategic planning. At the end of the week, they sent the council teams home with note-books of graphs, charts, copies of lectures presented by academic experts, and “how to” work sheets. The charge from the same USDA deputy undersecretary to the pilot states then was “Go out there - and just do it!”

What the early councils learned very quickly, however, was that the goals of the state council were not strategies but, rather were methods to be used to define how to become strategic councils. A strategic council is one whose members have the commitment and the capacity to achieve a comprehensive range of specific, targeted outcomes that can improve the quality of life and make real differences in rural communities. They achieve such outcomes—whether they relate to health care, business development, telecommunication, or job training—in an environment that is supportive of challenges to existing assumptions, as well as learning and working together across institutional boundaries.

The nature of the state council process, then, was two-fold: to create a collaborative environment in the states, and to help council members acquire the skills to work effectively in such environments. These skills may be categorized according to the following questions:

1. How do council members identify and frame rural issues strategically?
2. How do they go about galvanizing energy around such an issue?
3. How do they develop a strategy around that issue?
4. How do they implement such a strategy collaboratively?

⁵ From personal recall of the author.

A strategic council is an "action-learning" organization and its members learn how to manage the different stages in the "action-learning" process⁶ as the council moves forward. These stages, as experienced in Maine and other council states; are:

- Convening issues forums;
- Identifying and engaging stakeholder groups;
- Developing working teams or coalitions around issues;
- Developing projects;
- Making resource allocation decisions together;
- Undertaking project implementation efforts as partners;
- Reflecting on implementation lessons (and cycling back to the first stage).

In going through this process, council members acquire the public policy skills of assessing choices, options, benefits and consequences in their effort to become strategic. Becoming a learning organization and a strategic council, a SRDC needs to acquire certain knowledge and basic skills. These are:

- Knowledge about rural issues and organizational relationships;
- Undertaking needs and assets assessment in a network context;
- Thinking and acting strategically, and
- Practicing the politics of exchange.

1. *Knowledge about rural issues and organizational relationships.*

Council leaders need to learn how to acquire and make effective use of two types of knowledge in their work. The first is technical, dealing with subject matter areas in rural development. For example, councils need to know how to acquire and understand information about economic trends and conditions in a specific geographic area or an industry sector, and how to apply that information in their work. Understanding the broader concepts of "rural development,"⁷ and knowing how to act upon that understanding, are also important aspects of this competency.

⁶ The "action-learning" cycle can be repetitive for a number of reasons: councils are "peopled and re-peopled" continuously; circumstance and context change; new issues and different perspectives emerge (see diagram in Appendix section).

⁷ The work of Aspen Institute's Rural Economic Policy Program defines "rural development" in terms of the three interconnected concepts of "civic capacity," "stewardship," and "economic development" (see diagram in Appendix section). The Council of Governors' Policy Advisors offers a strategy for rural development that contains a multitude of elements: human capital, deployment of telecommunications and other advanced technologies, promoting entrepreneurship, facilitating access to capital, value added natural resources development, collaborative efforts on rural development, community leadership and capacity building, and public infrastructure.

The second type of knowledge involves the complex *network* in which the councils operate. The SRDC world comprises loosely coupled sets of linkages or relationships connecting people from participating agencies and organizations who are council members. They come together because they share key interests and goals; they develop shared symbols, a common language, a shared understanding, and a commitment to collaborate. As they work on joint projects and on mobilizing resources beyond traditional organizational boundaries, they need information and insight about partner agencies. This information includes their formal and informal mandates; organizational cultures and structures, (and often their policies and procedures); and their authority and influence in the larger network. Learning how to explore and understand the working of this network is a major challenge for SRDC members.

2. Needs and assets assessment.

This is an important attribute of being a strategic council —the ability to clearly identify needs and assets. It is a particularly challenging task when undertaken in the context of the SRDC world. Learning how to assess rural needs and assets *in the network context* is the key to council success, since council partners work together amidst the contrasting climates and cultures of individual member organizations and a constantly changing membership.

Needs assessment, along with resource inventory, is a continuous activity from at least two directions. First, rural input from the local community level must be solicited and encouraged to help identify and frame issues. Equally important, the insights from other knowledge bases of *both research and practice* must be included in the process.

To meet the challenge of this part of the "action-learning" cycle, the crucial tools or skills include:

- Organizing listening sessions and focus groups and documenting their results;
- Scanning and analysis;
- Identifying patterns and trends;
- Searching for relevant research information; and
- Testing and retesting assumptions and hypotheses in order that real priorities become clear.

3. Strategic thinking and action.

The SRDCs were established to rethink and reinvent how federal and state rural development policies are formulated and how programs are designed and implemented. The council process, therefore, is about innovation and change, requiring enhanced capacity for strategic think-

ing and action—not just in relation to the council but also in terms of the broader network. In this context, becoming strategic is a collective or corporate endeavor. It encompasses the coming together of many players with different agendas; framing issues in strategic terms acceptable to all partners; finding common ground within that framework; and mobilizing resources from all partner sources to support implementation efforts.

These kinds of strategic work within the larger network context require high levels of political and planning skills, such as expanding the action-learning circle by reaching out to new stakeholder groups and defining a collaborative role for the council.

A state council becomes increasingly effective as it moves from "issue exploration" to "strategic framing of issues." This is a deliberate movement away from free-flowing sharing toward a more structured, purposeful dialogue about rural needs and issues. Individual perceptions evolve into a collective consensus about what is needed. In this process, a clearer and more focused strategic role for the council emerges. One important aspect of the transition from issue exploration to strategic framing requires the council leadership to seek and capture "tactical opportunities" that can help define a council's strategic vision.

4. *Practicing the politics of exchange.*

Serving as both "forums" and "arenas,"⁸ the SRDCs are intended to build partnerships and collaborative arrangements across organizational boundaries. To engage in this process effectively requires skills in the politics of exchange.

Underlying this politics is the question, *What can the council do for me and what can I do for the council?* Unless such expectations or self-interests are clear, council members cannot work together effectively to find mutual interest and common ground. Council leaders need to learn a variety of crucial skills for team- and coalition-building. These include:

- Communicating effectively especially listening;
- Identifying and engaging all the key stakeholders;
- Surfacing and managing conflict among council members;
- Effectively challenging council members' own organizations;
- Adjusting organizational turf boundaries for greater permeability and flexibility;
- Differentiating individual from institutional agendas;

⁸ In Bryson and Crosby (1992), "forum" is used to describe settings for the "creation and communication of meaning" through forthright exchange and clarification of positions, perspectives, and points of view among stakeholder or interest groups. An "arena" refers to settings for "policy making and implementation" where negotiation and bargaining skills are used to reach common ground.

- Assessing and capitalizing on the power, interests, needs and assets of the partners;
- Making resource allocation decisions collaboratively.

How to practice the politics of exchange - between member organizations and within a member organization - is a key element to becoming a strategic council. More than anything else, it can help overcome individual and organizational resistance to change. The challenge here is to create a climate in which collaboration is the expectation and the norm.

3. Examples of How SRDCs Work

In attempting to carry out their distinctive intergovernmental roles, councils have developed a variety of approaches. An early evaluation of the SRDCs (Radin 1992), indicated that some states "viewed the effort as the creation of a new framework, venue, or forum for discussing rural issues. Several states focused on the ability of the council to coordinate resources, thereby providing more efficient and effective services... [Others] believed that the council would be able to change the rural policy system or actually stimulate economic development that would allow the state to be more competitive."

A National Governors Association (NGA) paper (Shonka et al. 1995) - based on field observations and interviews in the mid 1990s, described the heart of the SRDC function as creating "learning environments for effective rural development." This assessment pointed out that, when effectively managed, the SRDCs can "create an environment where managers of fragmented resources and representatives of rural communities can make rural development more effective. [In such cases, state councils] strive to create places where stakeholders in rural development can discuss complex issues, exchange information and perspectives, network and develop partnerships for action."

The NGA paper offered case studies of how the councils, as "learning environments," had created effective rural development outcomes. The Colorado Rural Development Council, for example, held community forums conjointly with council meetings to prioritize rural issues and develop strategic responses to them. Its work in the telecommunication arena was one example of outcomes that can result from such a process.

The Wisconsin Rural Development Council used annual "rural summits" to explicitly provide learning opportunities for its members. These yearly events provide members with opportunities to discuss issues and share perspective (as well as possible solutions). The council uses various mechanisms prior to the summit (e.g., leadership roundtables and community forums) to help frame issues strategically.

Forums sponsored by the Maine Rural Development Council had served a similar purpose. One such forum in December 1999 was devoted to the issue of agricultural development and the building of vibrant communities. It had several purposes. On one level, it was designed to deepen our understanding in Maine of the connection between *farming and community development*. Second, the forum process articulated a coherent policy agenda for the future of our state's agriculture and rural communities. Finally, in doing so, a coalition of stakeholders was built to move such an agenda forward.

Participants at this Maine SRDC event were diverse; nearly 200 attended from across the state. There were farmers or producers, service and resource providers, representatives of advocacy groups, students, educators, researchers, and policy makers. The latter included the state's legislative leadership, represented by the Agriculture Conservation and Forestry Committee Chair, Speaker of the House, and the Chair of the Legislature's Agricultural Vitality Zone Task Force. The Governor was the keynote speaker.

In the Maine example, the forum process evolved through three stages.⁹ It began with a plenary session that provided a comprehensive overview of conditions and trends affecting the future of Maine's agricultural and its sector communities. This was followed by six breakout work sessions on specific issue areas. These included: markets and marketing; sustainable farm management; cost of sprawl to farming; connecting farming to community building; structural changes in agricultural development; and food security. To each breakout session was assigned a "policy reporter," whose role was to listen to the session discussion and debate for policy implications. These then were reported back in the final plenary panel session.

There are other examples of how state councils - working in such a collaborative learning mode - have produced notable rural development outcomes. On both policy and project levels, these outcomes included: New Hampshire's Incubator Kitchen Project that helps support home based food processing businesses in its North Country region; Florida's effort to develop a collaborative state-wide affordable housing policy; Idaho's successful effort to foster partnerships in programming between two historically competing rural programs - USDA funded Resource Conservation and Development Areas and EDA funded economic development districts.

⁹ An agenda of the Maine agricultural development and community building forum is provided in the Appendix section.

4. SRDCs Confront Critical Rural Issues

Understanding the issues that the state councils are wrestling with is an especially instructive way to see where and how the academy and the practice of community development can be joined in support of the SRDC movement. The issues that have pre-occupied the attention of the state councils generally fall into the following sets - perhaps more so in some states than in others.

(1) ***How do we capitalize on the richness of rural America's diversity - and nurture it effectively for the common good?*** The tapestry of Rural America is vast, sweeping, diverse, complex - from the hills of New England to the hollows of Appalachia; from the plains of the Midwest to the Mississippi Delta; from the settlements on the Texan border to the Big Sky Country of Idaho and Montana - and the domain of this land's First Nations; and from Alaska and the Hawaiian Islands to what my ancestors in the 19th Century called "the land of the Golden Mountain."

Rural development is multidimensional and has many faces - in these lie the richness and challenges of our work. The practice of rural development is certainly about jobs and infrastructure. It is also about stewardship of our environment and resources; the building of vibrant communities; the fostering and promotion of social justice and equity. The principles of diversity and inclusion are critical to the partnership. The councils need to learn how to live and apply this principle in their work. And help is needed from the academy and the community development profession.

Recently, for example, some 70 Hispanic families moved to a fishing village in Downeast Maine. They came to work at a sea-urchin processing plant. Products from the plant are air freighted to Japan and marketing is done on the Internet. Overnight, the community of this tiny fishing village faced a new array of issues - affordable housing; living wages; and English as a second language.

Technology and globalization have resulted, not only in the cultural transformation of our rural communities but also have caused the expansion of the issues we face in the practice of rural development.

(2) ***How do we seek long term answers to the fundamental structural changes in the nation's rural economies?*** How do we build and sustain vibrant communities confronted by these irreversible changes? In Maine, for example, how do we protect and sustain the state's working landscape and working waterfronts - threatened by growth and development?

Production agriculture in Maine operates on two separate, but not necessarily complimentary, tracks: (1) the traditional bulk commodity

sector (potato and apple) continues to be vulnerable to consolidation and (2) the niche production sector as represented by the family farm is struggling to survive. Both tracks affect community vibrancy. New community development issues have surfaced. These include: marketing and market development (from export to “buy local”); how to develop small scale value adding technologies; risk management; work force scarcity; and finally, the “right to farm” in the midst of sprawl.

(3) ***How do we revitalize communities in distressed regions?*** In the economic development field lingers a never-ending debate: whether to nurture and grow existing businesses (and help sprout new ones), or lure in firms from elsewhere. For many states, the response is to do both. Underlying this response is the realization that many of the conditions that make a community good for business are good for *all* businesses - whether new or existing, locally grown or externally recruited. For this response to work on both fronts, there must be coordinated targeting of resources - particularly in distressed regions of the nation. This targeting includes: technical assistance, financing, work force training, infrastructure development, transportation and transit assistance, and other initiatives.

In this context, entrepreneurship needs to be considered as a strategy for rural development. According to recent studies, (Reynolds, etal. 1999 and Kayne 1999) there is clear correlation between the level of entrepreneurial activity and economic growth. Imaginative ways are needed to promote and support entrepreneurship in rural places. The rural entrepreneur has many faces; it is the DOT.COMs, but it is also the artisan, the crafter, natural resource-based value added venturer, and the B&B operator. Strategies, therefore, must be varied, innovative and locally driven.

(4) ***How do we make technology more available and accessible in isolated rural places?*** Rural areas historically lag behind their urban counterparts in gaining access to and adopting technological advances. Several reasons include small population means little demand; distance and low population density drive up costs; and conservative culture and lack of familiarity slows adoption. Not waiting for rural areas to catch up, the importance of keeping pace with new technology grows ever faster. Technology is changing the way we work. Indeed, it is redefining “comparative advantage.” For workers, firms, and regions to exploit that advantage, they must be willing to learn the technology, stay abreast of it, and use it. The latter can result from affordable access as well as training and technical assistance.

(5) ***How do we build more and better pathways from poverty on all fronts?*** The rural poverty rate in America continues to surpass the urban rate. In 1995, the rural rate stood at 15.6 percent, compared with the urban rate of 13.4. In rural pockets - the Delta and Appalachia as well as Indian reservations and the colonias along the border of Texas, the rate is

even higher. Moreover, some 60 percent of the rural poor are in families in which at least one person works. Reasons for poverty include low wage jobs, seasonal employment, inter-generational transfer, disability, low education/low aspiration/low skill, discrimination, and others.

Consequently, trying to alleviate poverty can take many shapes, but most approaches fall within one of two categories. The first is to provide a safety-net to at least support people in poverty if not lift them above it. The minimum wage is an example of this approach. The second seeks to empower those in poverty and enable them to climb higher on the economic ladder. This entails strategic allocation and coordinated use of resources in such areas as housing and transportation assistance, child and health care, adult education, job training and placement support, entrepreneurial assistance, and other initiatives.

(6) How do we build civic capacity to support comprehensive, long-term “self-development” strategies? While some rural communities have prosperity thrust into their laps, most small rural towns and villages lack the capacity to mount a full-scale development effort. Economic development, therefore, must entail community building. That is, the civic capacity (local leadership, vision, knowledge of place and its assets, institutions, citizen engagement, and the like) must be enhanced to foster effective development.

The appendix section of the paper provides a two-page matrix containing assessment observations of capacity building processes in six very different regions of Maine, (from “Community Capacity Building in Maine - Work in Progress,” Maine Rural Development Council, January, 2000). Capacity building is a particularly complex process. It needs - quite desperately - new knowledge from the research community, support from skilled practitioners and incentives from the policy arena.

These six questions return us to the paper’s thesis - that the academy and the practice of community development should - and must - find ways to connect in the SRDC arena. The issue is how to “extend” and “apply” academic capacity in distressed communities where the need for it is the greatest. It is my belief that the state councils are the forums and launching pads for developing innovative approaches to extend and apply this capacity in the nation’s rural places. The act of becoming engaged with each other can be transformational for all: the academy, the community development profession and the state council partners.

5. Conclusion and a Postscript

This paper described the SRDC movement through three lenses. One was the policy rationale for its establishment a decade ago and how that early rationale was shaped and reshaped continuously to meet the councils changing *modus operandi* in varying state contexts. Secondly, it

looked at the movement through the lens of how the councils function - the nature of the council process. And finally, it considered a cohort of issues that the state councils have taken on through the years as the core content of their work.

The image of the state councils that has emerged through these lenses is one of a potentially, powerful movement for revitalizing rural America in fundamental ways. It is a movement poised at the strategic intersection of policy, research and practice. Realizing its full potential as a movement, however, awaits the connection with and support from both the academy and the community development profession.

Of all the key players at the beginning of the partnership in the early 1990s, Professor Ron Shaffer understood this sooner and better than anyone else. He worked assiduously to help the state councils acquire the knowledge and skill needed to operate effectively at that intersection. Professor Shaffer believed that state council members, whatever their agency affiliation or their bureaucratic roles - are first and foremost "community builders." The act of community building must be informed by research and tested in practice. Moreover, he consistently challenged us to use what we learned from both research and practice to shape better policies - and get rid of the bad ones.


What Professor Shaffer represented was at times a lonely stance in the national partnership. He pursued his passion with persistence and grace. That was his ultimate gift to the partnership - one that has transformed and enriched our work, for which we are deeply indebted.

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Appendix 1.

"Community Capacity Building" in Maine - Work in Progress (January, 2000)

<p>Projects & Indicators</p> 	<p>Open, broad-based Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse, inclusive citizen participation • Expanding (renewable) leadership base • Informal, collaborative decision making 	<p>Place-based Vision and Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared understanding of the issues and vision • Local assets identified and mobilized • Strategic community agenda 	<p>Outcome/result oriented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger community org/institutions • More effective (targeted) use of resources • Tangible progress toward goals
<p>1. Georges River Clam Project</p>	<p>Involved 3 broad-based stakeholder groups: Citizen Water Quality Monitoring Group (est. 1989); 5 local towns coming together (Thomasston, S Thomasston, Warren, Cushing, and St. George); and coalition of clam diggers (numbered about 300).</p>	<p>Improved water quality; more sustainable management of a heavily used resource; reopen a clam field closed since the 1980's; stakeholders came to the table and learned to power-share.</p>	<p>Inter-local agreement in place for multi-community shell fish management plan; by a 1996 act of legislature the 5 towns became a "single ecological unit," hence one shell fish mgmt committee for all towns; region now allows 100-120 digger licenses annually with harvest value of \$ 2 million.</p>
<p>2. <i>Piscataquis on the Move</i>: County Economic Development Council/RWED ("Rural Workforce and Entrepreneurship Development") Coalition</p>	<p>In 1998, 4 major towns (Dover-Foxcroft, Guilford, Milo and Greenville) came together to develop a regional strategy; major players included the area's 2 chambers of commerce, Mayo hospital, adult education programs, Guilford of Maine, County Extension; leadership base stable; power appears evenly distributed; 300-member council, 47-member board and 8-member ExCom.</p>	<p>1998 regional strategy calls for business expansion and retention; marketing; and building a regional economic development capacity; agenda driven at times by grant opportunities; local asset are quality of life, home-based businesses, local institutions (Foxcroft Academy, hospital), Guilford of Maine) and wood products industry; recent attention to long term human resource issues.</p>	<p>New, strong inter-institutional relationships are emerging (e.g. EMTC/Mayo/Adulted; "RWED Center" Project); Cultural-Heritage-Eco tourism and home-based business development initiatives are examples of effective use of external resources; an active marketing program in place; PCEDEC is becoming a dynamic organization.</p>
<p>3. River Valley Growth Council/Western Mountains Alliance</p>	<p>A just-started effort to develop a regional strategy from the bottom up involving 8 towns (Rumford, Mexico, Dixfield, Peru, Roxbury, Bryon, Hanover and Andover); stakeholders engaged include: paper company, health care, public schools, and host of public minded citizens; need to overcome historical enmity between and among towns</p>	<p>Presently in gestation; need to capture local knowledge of sectoral strengths and weaknesses as well as the region's natural resource base; recruit and bring visionary, long term thinkers to the table; health of Androscoggin River is key; strategies must accommodate in concert the area's economic, environmental and human concerns.</p>	<p>Must learn to walk first and overcome local aversion to cooperation and regionalism before putting in place a double regional growth plan.</p>

Appendix 1. Continued

<p>Projects & Indicators</p> 	<p>Open, broad-based Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diverse, inclusive citizen participation Expanding (renewable) leadership base Informed, collaborative decision making 	<p>Place-based Vision and Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared understanding of the issues and vision Local assets identified and mobilized Strategic community agenda 	<p>Outcome/result oriented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger community organizations More effective (targeted) use of resources Tangible progress toward goals
<p>4. Limestone Renewal</p>	<p>1993 closure of Loring AFB compelled citizens to organize and capacity-build; had leadership problems in the early days ("only 5 people came to the first meeting"); underwent "community catalyst" planning process and formed broad based core group; local spark plugs supported by significant external partners (e.g., MCF and CCD)</p>	<p>Local assets in 1999 vision statement: quality of life; strong local business community; educational resources; the Loring Commerce Centre; foreign trade zone; natural resource base and tourism. Clarity of strategic plan calling for: life long learning center; promote self employment and organic farming as well as tourism; improve housing stock; marketing; enhance social service delivery.</p>	<p>Limestone Development Foundation in place; "community catalyst" group meeting regularly; Math and Science High School operational (3 years); depopulation trend reversed: all vacant houses now occupied; tax base improved.</p>
<p>5. Schoodic Area Futures</p>	<p>Base closure led to organizing effort by chamber of commerce and expanded to include other sectors (health, education, social services, etc); 6 area towns are involved (Franklin, Gouldsboro, Sorrento, Steuben, Sullivan, and Winter Harbor). Like elsewhere, internal spark plugs are important (e.g., Winter Harbor town mgr.)</p>	<p>Not quite there yet. BUT are considering such strategic options as tourism, retirement community, fishery, etc. Towns NEED to power and resource share, and develop "regional voice" and vision. External resource and service providers are respectful of internal process.</p>	<p>Town governance and identity are asserted and enhanced as result of citizen engagement in the Schoodic Futures process; and on the other hand, multi-community "Schoodic Futures" entity aspires to provide regional identity and voice; inherent tension between the two needs to be resolved; group meets regularly; year around arts program resulted from summer festival.</p>
<p>6. Washington County Story: JOZ, Sustainable Cobscook, Sunrise County Economic Council, et al -</p>	<p>Inclusive membership (town and county governments, tribe, industry sectors, education, social and health services, small and micro businesses); mature/stable leadership ("leading but not managing ..."); long history of working together - since JOZ days.</p>	<p>Clear focus on issues: strengthen area's natural resource base; access to development resources ("...getting into the loop"); and business and multi-community partnership building. Six clusters of capacity building activities: Jonesport economic renewal; "downeast" area chamber of commerce; Machias Bay business development; St Croix economic alliance; and Cobscook Bay Resource Center.</p>	<p>Strong coalitions built between and among agencies, schools, tribes and towns: "Coordinated State Investment Strategy" resulted; Eastport port facility is one of many outcomes; unemployment rate down from 13% to 9%; county wide networks of over 100 volunteers working in host of multi-community groups.</p>