

**OHIO ARC
APPALACHIAN COMMUNITY LEARNING PROJECT
(ACLP)**

2005-2006 FINAL RESULTS

**Prepared For:
The Appalachian Regional Commission**

**Prepared By:
David Watson-Hallowell and Tim Noonan
The Rensselaerville Institute
February 2007**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	3
THE TRAINING MODEL	5
SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES	6
PROJECT RESULTS	7
LESSONS LEARNED	

Overview

The Appalachian Community Learning Project (ACLP) is an asset-based approach to grassroots community change. Even the most distressed communities draw upon their own asset base, whether those assets are financial, leadership, trade skills, or sheer muscle, to begin to create positive change in their communities. A small government investment along with an action-oriented training catalyzes the process. The action approach focuses a community team's energies on the tasks at hand, rather than diverting critical energies to filling out forms and grant applications, documenting elaborate long-range plans, or writing reports to defend decisions. The ACLP approach harnesses communal energy to take action, not suffocate energy through extensive planning. Community participants set targets with clear results and have six months to achieve them. This short-term, real time approach directs and sustains the energy and enthusiasm that is developed in the two-day ACLP training phase. At the end of the six months, groups meet again to share the results of their efforts. This gives every community a chance to brag and a time to reflect on what they have learned. Each group leaves with renewed energy to continue the project or to create targets around a new enterprise.

The ACLP methodology consists of a two-day facilitated training session that allows communities to become familiar with an outcome framework and to create an economic and/or community development project. Community groups are convened with the Appalachian Regional Commission, the investor, to first develop a vision for their community. For the majority of the two days, they develop an action plan built around a map metaphor that will move their community closer to their desired vision. The plan includes a measurable target as well as milestones to measure progress toward the goal. At the conclusion of the workshop, each community presents their plan to the investor. The investor provides an immediate decision making a maximum investment of \$3,000 and teams return home to implement their project using their targets and milestones.

The ACLP approach, jointly developed by the ARC and the Rensselaerville Institute, is an empowerment model designed to help move economically distressed, government reliant communities toward self-reliance. ACLP provides seed money to home-grown community building efforts; no team is ever mandated to focus on a particular task or activity. It is a unique capacity building methodology specifically designed to empower community residents who are ready, willing, and able to take action. Unlike traditional government approaches that involve grants and appropriations based on demonstrated need, the ACLP approach more closely resembles a private market investment. Grants are awarded by an investor, not a funder, and are based on the merits of a plan that addresses market-fit and resource identification and utilization. Unlike typical government programs where the focus on the objectives of the grantor, the ACLP approach puts communities' preferences on center stage. Once the seed investment catalyzes the process, ARC as the investor gets out of the way, allowing community groups to control the project and to make appropriate adjustments to their plans without prior approval. Accountability is achieved as communities report back to their investor on milestone achievement to indicate progress toward the target. All of the work, and significant portions of project funding, comes from the communities and they deserve full credit for their achievements.

The ACLP process initially bore a leadership moniker. While leadership skills developed and demonstrated by group sparkplugs are central to the model and a fundamental byproduct of the approach, learnings were recognized as equally important. Learning was incorporated into the ACLP name to stress how vital learning-while-doing is to team success. Participants are encouraged to overcome the obstacles that hamper successful implementation and to apply those learnings to their continuing work. Much as private entrepreneurs and for-profit businesses incorporate feedback loops to stay ahead of the competition, the ACLP designers believed communities who continually reflect and learn would outperform the results typically achieved through conventional funders where evaluation and feedback is considered only after the fact.

Because ACLP is designed around measurable outcomes, the success of the program is more easily assessable than typical government approaches to social capital building. While teams achieve tremendous results using their work plans and milestones, sparkplugs always report additional success around quality of life, aesthetic improvements, and attitudinal changes such as greater satisfaction with community, greater community cohesiveness and unity among community organizations, hope for a brighter future, and the knowledge that lasting positive change is achievable with existing community resources.

The ACLP approach was designed around a set of preconceived notions and assumptions about the communities with which we would work. We set out to test the following critical assumptions about grassroots community revitalization:

- Poor communities are just as capable of fundamental transformation using the assets they have as those communities with a strong financial resource base.
- An action-oriented training program where the tools must be applied in real time and the results of the effort are readily apparent is more likely to stick with trainees and be used over and over again than one where it is sufficient for trainees to understand presented content conceptually.
- Learning produces change and change produces learning. Like business entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs are most successful when they are able to immediately adjust their strategies to changing circumstance. If a grassroots transformative process is to take hold, it must be fully and immediately responsive to iterative feedback loops.
- The real key to successful community change is human resource – it is the scarcest resource and far more important than financial resource.
- A truly transformative process leaves behind evidence. The evidence may be visual; it may be economic; it may be demonstrated quantitatively in socio-economic statistics; it may be reflected in changing attitudes, falling barriers, and greater individual satisfaction. To the degree social, economic, and leadership capacity has been truly enhanced, these results will be lasting. ACLP efforts that have truly succeeded will demonstrate sustainability; they will grow and continue to produce results when ARC and the Rensselaerville Institute are no longer involved.

The Training Model

After being nominated by representatives of the local development districts or by state community/economic development staff, team sparkplugs and a representative of the Rensselaerville Institute have a conversation to assess the community's readiness and appropriateness for ACLP. Some communities are removed after the screening process.

When the groups are convened for the investment workshop, they do not know the particulars of what they will be asked to do to receive the mini-grant investment. No promise is made that every group at the workshop will receive an investment. Every stride is made to get every community to develop effective targets of interest to the investor, but the investor can defer any decision after the investment presentation on the second day.

Most of the participants are from small rural communities in distressed counties. The Appalachian Regional Commission has developed criteria for the statistical measures of a distressed county. In some cases, group members do not know one another before participating in ACLP and in most cases, communities do not know one another. Before arriving at the workshop, each community sparkplug is asked to convene his/her team and to begin developing a vision of their ideal community complete with the sights, smells, and sounds in their vision of a healthy vibrant place to live.

At the two-day workshop, participants are taken through the strategic mapping of a specific, concrete community development project of their choice that moves the community closer to the vision, or destination, created initially. At the close of the second day, teams are required to present to the investor (ARC) the target(s), or projected result(s), of their efforts as well as the specific, measurable milestones they must hit along the way to be successful. Immediately following the presentation, the team receives an on-the-spot investment if the investor believes in the project's aims and the capacity of the team to deliver results. If the investor considers the project unlikely to produce results (the map is not well thought through, the milestones are vague, the project does not appear achievable in six months), then additional mapping assistance is provided until the team produces a viable project.

Teams are followed over the six months as they report on their success in achieving milestones and are given technical assistance to help them stay on track and overcome obstacles along the way. No groups receive additional funds from ARC or time extensions.

At the end of six months, the communities reconvene to report their success, commiserate their failures, and to learn about achieving more results in the future. Specifically, the groups document the following return on investment to the investor.

1. Did you achieve the targets? Yes or No
2. What targets did you achieve?
3. How did you achieve these targets?
4. What did you learn and what did you do with that information?
5. What unexpected side effects or impacts resulted from your project?

ACLP Results in 2005

In March of 2005, a planning session took place in Columbus to map out a new ACLP initiative for Ohio. The state of Ohio has been a participant in the program in the past and enjoyed a strong following both from the communities and the Local Development Districts (LDDs). Sparked by the ACLP's strong fit to ARC's Asset Based approach to community development and a desire to develop in-house capacity to deliver the program, an initial round of 6 communities was planned for. Buckeye Hills- Hocking Valley and Ohio River Valley development corporations were involved in this planning and were asked to do the outreach and identification of sparkplugs in distressed counties of Meigs, Pike, Jackson, Galia, and Monroe.

In May of 2005, the Appalachian Regional Commission, The Ohio Governors Office on Appalachia and the Rensselaerville Institute presented the ACLP training program to 6 community groups at Burr Oak State Park. At the conclusion of this workshop, each of the 6 communities was awarded a \$3,800 grant to implement their projects.

Rensselaerville Institute staff, in concert with LDD and governors office staff, utilized bi-weekly conference calls to assist communities in the refining and implementation of their plans. At several critical points in the project, both LDD and governors office staff were there with advice assistance and in some cases facilitations within the communities.

Seven months after the initial workshop, the groups reconvened to report on the results of their efforts. No follow-up investment was promised or made, but communities were asked to report on how they will continue their project or shift their focus to a new venture.

In addition to the \$22,800 invested in the six communities, ARC expended \$45,000 over the course of the six months in direct support costs. These costs include the initial and concluding training workshops, the travel, meals, and lodging expenses of 32 participants, and the technical assistance provided during the implementation phase.

Summary of Outcomes

Of the six projects, all met most or all of their targets with 3 projects far exceeding expectations. The 6 projects leveraged a total \$107,350 in materials, labor and donations.

Project Results

“Field of Goals” - Beaver, Ohio

Results

- Increased child participation in soccer program from 100 to 160
- Sponsorship dollars increased from \$1,200 to over \$3,000
- Game day attendance up to 500
- First Beaver school soccer team fielded and competed in tournament

- Increased concession sales by \$150 per weekend (33% increase)
- Game day sales at local ice cream store up 40%, weeknight sales up 8%

Areas of Gain

- Volunteer base increased by 20 new members for 40 total volunteers.
- The total leveraged dollars including volunteer time, exceeded \$8,000

Project Summary

Beaver decided to accommodate a growing interest in youth soccer and a decline in school enrollment (due to a lack of a soccer program) with a new soccer field on the site of underutilized, unattractive park area in town. Having received an ODNR grant for a concession pavilion the year prior, the group felt they were poised to make a big difference for youth, the community and soccer in Beaver.

The project moved ahead smoothly but not without detours. Beneath the old grass, there was a layer of limestone and rubble. This discovery necessitated a shifting a in field location and the use of tillers, rakes and hand-picking and removal of debris before the field could be graded, leveled, and seeded. Drought conditions further hampered efforts but the Beaver Fire Department rescued the field with thousands of gallons of water.

Project sparkplug Bruce Overly offers three bits of advice for new ACLP communities: Involve as many people as possible, network with other groups, and get kids involved.

A follow up call in early 2007 revealed the Field of Goals lives on and continues to make a big difference for Beaver and surrounding communities. The park continued to grow and improve last year with a \$17k grant from ODNR and a big increase in use of the fields. Some of the latest results:

- Enrollment in the program is up from 160 to 190 kids
- Attendance at games up from 500 to over 800, bringing kids and families into town from 7 school districts
- Park Director position established with a \$5k annual budget
- School enrollment decline has been reversed for the first time in over 10 years, increasing by about 20 students this year.

“Sunfish Creek Boat Launch to Ohio River” - Clarington, Ohio

Results

- Increased boats using the launch from 6 per week to over 20 per week
- Increased local merchant sales by over 20%
- One new business opened
- Leveraged over \$3,350 in volunteer labor, materials, etc.
- Received a \$3,500 grant from Monroe county CIC to assist in acquiring the 10 lots adjacent to the boat launch.

Impact on Community Assets

- Increased community volunteers from 6 to 10 and involved new group, the County Community Service program.
- Transformed an old junkyard into an attraction for community members and visitors by repairing an old boat ramp, clearing debris, and building an attractive lighted parking area for boaters and fishermen
- Barn Mural painted at entrance to town and junk cars removed
- Three downtown sidewalks renovated, banners placed, flower pots donated and maintained
- A huge increase in pride felt by most Clarington residents

Project Summary

Clarington decided to revitalize the downtown area by preserving and enhancing one of the towns greatest assets, river access to the Ohio River. This boat launch and an more attractive and inviting downtown would hopefully draw more customer to the towns businesses.

This project was especially challenging given the local spirit had been dampened by a lack of work for many residents due to an aluminum plant closure. Community morale was a bit on the low side and volunteers proved more difficult to recruit than expected. Once things got started and people saw things happening, more and more got on board and either help[ed] directly with the project or did their own part in helping to beautify the community. One resident removed several rusted out cars from his property and many residents along the main street have redone their front walks.

Sparkplug Lida Conn had one piece of advice for ACLP communities – “Things beyond your control can impact on short term targets so do most you can with what you have!”

A follow up contact in early 2007 revealed the project is still going strong with land adjacent to the boat launch having been acquired and plans submitted for a park with a gazebo, picnic area, concessions, and canoe and boat rental. The grant from ODNR has been received and construction has started in phase 2 of the plan and things are proceeding on schedule. Use of the ramp continues to be strong and brings new boaters every week. This year boats are averaging over 30 per week - even in the fall and winter as duck hunters have found this location to be a good one. Additional signage fro the boat ramp is being provided by a local sheltered workshop. The Sunfish Creek Festival planning is well underway and this year organizations are calling reserve spots for booths and concessions.

”Vinton Serenity Gardens” – Vinton, Ohio

Results

- Increased use of the park from 0 to 10 people per day

- Increased use by area senior programs from 0 to twice per month
- Increased Farmer's Market revenue from \$25 per vendor/ day to over \$60

Impact on Community Assets

- Increased community volunteers from 0 to 15
- Transformed 2 vacant FEMA lots from an eyesore in the center of town into an accessible park with a gazebo, refinished covered pavilion with landscaped gardens.
- Leveraged over \$1,800 in volunteer labor and materials.

Project Summary

The Vinton area is home to many seniors you have little recreational opportunities. Two vacant FEMA lots adjacent to the senior center and a farmers market seemed like a great place for an accessible park for seniors and the rest of the community. It was hoped that an attractive park rather than an eyesore would provide a place for public gatherings and enhance sales at the Farmers Market. Currently, impromptu live music in the evenings is played in a convenience store parking lot and it is hoped that this new park will prove to be a better venue and attract even more out of town visitors.

The project got off to a good start completing the most of their key steps on time. Volunteer help was not as plentiful as hoped as much of the town became embroiled over connecting to a new sewer system. While this distraction did not effect the completion of the park, its utilization and the team plans for a grand opening were derailed. The town has made a commitment to spend \$3,000 in the coming year on improvements to the new park and shelters.

Further follow up calls were not successful.

“Marion Park Renovation”– Chesterhill. Ohio

Results

- Increased community use of the park from 0 to 50 per day
- Generated over \$20,000 in park memberships.
- Leveraged approximately \$65,000 in materials and labor.

Impact on Community Assets

- Increased community members volunteering from 4 to 40.
- Village that was divided and upset over the loss of the school has been reunited around the creation of this new community asset
- Created a beautiful park and recreation facility for community members and future events such as Harvest Festival and Old Timer Baseball games
- Created a new recreation “line item” in the Chesterhill budget

Project Summary

Chesterhill is a small town and proud of its past. Preserving history and providing recreation is the challenge this group of sparkplugs took on. The Marion School, once a proud symbol of the town that was in a state of neglect, disrepair, and piles of rubble, has been transformed into a park with gardens, benches, 1,000 yard long exercise path, reconditioned basketball court and a brand new baseball field with fencing and dugouts!

The results of the project far exceeded expectations of team members and community members alike! This group was quick to get started and they never looked back. A key to their success was calling on the Marion Park Alumni association which proved to be a tremendous resource in getting the job done. Additionally this group did an exceptional job of getting local businesses to participate in the creation of this beautiful park.

A follow up call in early 2007 revealed things are moving forward very well indeed. The gym adjacent to the park has been renovated with 2 new furnaces and now serves as a community center. In addition to the gym the center provides computer access and education for residents. They have started a Farmers Market in the summer to raise money for the parks and recreation department. A theater is now part of the landscape in Chesterhill and is also thriving. All three facilities enjoy a high level of utilization with weekly and daily programs. Finally, a group of local citizens has formed a corporation and is leasing the community center from the town so they can run and manage the facility, further increasing its value to the community.

All of these things have been accomplished through volunteer labor, strong leadership from newcomers to the community and support from the Voinovich Center. They provided Chesterhill with an assessment of what was most needed. Broadband was the answer and they are now in the process of getting that. They hope to serve the entire county and view it as a utility to be provided or purchased by county residents.

“Athalia Park Restoration” – Athalia, Ohio

Results

- Increased use of park from 0 to 50 per week
- Increase use by kids from 0 to 15 day
- Increase activities at the park from 0 to 1 every 6 months
- Held the 1st Annual Blue Grass by the River music Festival bringing in \$1,140 in sales and donations
- Increased out of town visitors to over 200
- One new business opened

Impact on Community Assets

- Volunteer base increased by 25 new members for 30 total volunteers. Additionally, 3 community groups worked together to put on the festival
- The total leveraged dollars including volunteer time, exceeded \$6,800
- Completely renovated park with new shelter, grills, benches, basketball court, playground equipment and landscaping.

Project Summary

This community decided to address the lack of recreation and safe play spaces for their kids by taking a dilapidated unused park and turning it into a beautiful park and center for community activities. In addition to that they hoped to generate some traffic and revenue in town by hosting the first Annual Blue Grass by the River festival. After a huge success despite bad weather, the group hopes to do it again next year. Starting a new business in town was a challenge that was overcome by the sheer determination of the sparkplug for the project. Since he wasn't able to bring in a business, he decided to start his own!

A follow up call in early 2007 revealed the park is still drawing at least 50 people per week and kids daily, even in the winter time! The new business is still up and running and the team remains enthusiastic and looking for a way to embark on another project!

“ALL Community Center”- Stockport, Ohio

Results

- Decreased vandalism from \$2,500 per year to \$0
- Involved 5 youth in planning and building the skateboard park
- Increased out of town traffic from 20/weekend to 30/weekend

Impact on Community Assets

- Youth volunteer base increased by 8
- Leveraged over \$1,100 in volunteer labor and donated equipment and supplies
- Stockport has a beautiful skate park - the only in the county

Project Summary

Youth are a primary concern in this town and with little to do and no place to go, vandalism has been on the rise. At the same time, the team realized that the future of Stockport is the youth of the community and wanted to involve them in the project from the very beginning. The group started out strong but ran into some difficulties with some members leaving the team and a change in project sparkplug. Despite these setbacks, the team rallied to complete the park to the delight of local and out of town youth.

Further follow up calls were unsuccessful.

Lessons Learned

On the Process:

- Recruitment of appropriate communities proved a more challenging and time consuming task than had been anticipated. While we thought one month would be adequate it now appears that a 2 month time –frame would be more suitable and create less stress.
- Some communities still were unaware of what to expect after arriving for the workshop. It was suggested that introductory information given to the communities before the workshop be modified to include more examples, especially ones from Ohio.
- The two day workshop format was used and again demonstrated its value and importance when bringing a team together around a project. Teams ranged in size from 1 to 8 members. The large team struggled with “too many cooks” syndrome, while the single person team didn’t have enough. While the large group did eventually get it together and come up with an excellent plan, the single person team required much more follow up after the workshop to refine their plan and incorporate input from other involved community members. It will be important to stress the need for at least 3 people per community to attend the workshop and not more than 6.
- The presentation of material was somewhat “flat” and “dragged” a bit for some participants. In this session we attempted to spread out the presentation among two TRI staff while giving a part to Ohio staff that wanted to build their capacity in the approach. Too many presenters can disrupt the flow of a session, particularly when the presenters are not experienced with the material. Limit the number of presenters next time to no more than two.
- The workbook while generally effective could use additional and different examples of Civic and Economic Gain.
- Many communities had hoped to attract new businesses but most were struggling to make that happen. After discussing this situation with the communities and investor staff, it became apparent that something different needed to happen. Based on the premise that the resources for business success are out there but difficult to obtain, we decided to hold a “Business Fair” for communities that would feature a “one-stop-shop” for all business needs whether expanding an existing one or starting a new one. Working closely with BHHV Development and the Monroe County Director of Economic Development, we assembled over 20 support groups such as SBDCs, Revolving Loan Funds, marketing and web specialists, financial consultants, etc. to provide the services these prospective business owners or business owners would need. The event was well attended and much appreciated by participants. Over 70 people attended one or both evening sessions and based on feedback, more than 75% found what they were looking for in terms of support, advice, and services.

ACLP Results in 2006

In February and March 2006, the Appalachian Regional Commission, The Ohio Governors Office on Appalachia and the Rensselaerville Institute presented the ACLP training program to 9 community groups in Athens, Ohio and to one community group on site in South Webster, Ohio. At the conclusion of these three workshops, ARC invested \$30,000 in 10 projects designed and managed by 10 primarily rural and distressed communities.

Six months after the initial workshop, the groups reconvened to report on the results of their efforts. No follow-up investment was promised or made, but communities were asked to report on how they will continue their project or shift their focus to a new venture.

In addition to the \$30,000 invested in the ten communities, ARC expended \$55,000 over the course of the six months in direct support costs. These costs include the initial and concluding training workshops, the travel, meals, and lodging expenses of 45 participants, and the technical assistance provided during the implementation phase.

Summary of Outcomes

Of the ten projects, all ten met all or some of their targets. Five teams accomplished all of their targets and three accomplished at least 75% in the six month period. The remaining two teams, while accomplishing some of their targets, struggled to generate community enthusiasm for the project. Both teams also struggled to maintain the original workshop group, losing team members as implementation progressed.

In terms of leveraging, the ten communities leveraged \$ in financial capital and non-labor contributions from ARC's mini-grant investment of \$30,000. This is an average non-labor leverage ratio of :1, or \$ raised for every ARC dollar invested. This does not include the volunteer support teams generated, an average of hours per community for those communities that tracked the information.

No attempt was made to quantify intangible benefits such as renewed hope for the future of a community or a new "can do" spirit in the ACLP communities. All 10 communities report concrete plans for the future of the ACLP work or for other ventures to move closer to the ideal community they envisioned at the start of the first workshop. Having shown themselves and their communities what can be accomplished with a little money and a lot of hard work, the sparkplugs report a new confidence and a new reliance on the skills and talents of community residents.

Project Results

“Clarington Opera House” - Clarington, Ohio

Results

- Increased revenue at targeted local businesses by an average of 15%.
- 3 new or expanded businesses in the community.
- Opera house is booked every weekend
- Teen dances twice per month, and Square Dancing once per month

Areas of Gain

- Volunteer base increased by 20 new members for 28 total volunteers.
- The total cash equivalent of the volunteer work on this project was \$5,600.

Project Summary

In a follow-up project to the team’s initial ACLP work, the sparkplugs began the restoration of an old and forgotten community asset – the Opera House. With an excellent view of the Ohio River from the back of the Opera House, the space has a perfect central location for community events. After removing plywood, linoleum, and layers of paints, they discovered original wood floors, antique beadboard moldings, and a stage that had been covered for many years. Now that the restoration is complete, they are working with a community college to bring theater activities to the facility. They are also booking the space for activities for children including teen dances and children’s birthday parties.

“Coalton Athletic Center” - Coalton, Ohio

Results

- Generated \$606 in profit from concession stand sales.

Areas of Gain

- Completely refurbished softball field and concession stand.
- Volunteer base increased by 30 new members for 40 total volunteers.
- The cash equivalent of 1,110 volunteer hours is \$8,880.
- Leveraged \$741.13 in cash donations from a variety of sources.

Project Summary

Coalton chose to take an existing but declining community asset – the former Coalton elementary school – and to use this space to create a positive, sustainable resource – the Coalton softball field and concession stand. Coalton has faced fiscal crisis over the past few years after a

town officials stole substantial sums and team members delayed the softball field for a time while the town fought to institute a tax levy to keep Coalton an incorporated entity. While the team did spend a portion of their mini-grant after the learning session, they completed the necessary field repairs including a protective cap over the outfield fence as mandated by insurance regulations. They will also be making arrangements with teams, tournament sponsors, and other interested parties to receive payments for field use in 2007.

“Revitalization of Coolville” - Coolville, Ohio

Results

- Two new specialty businesses opened.
- Local business sales increased by 30% during festival days.

Areas of Gain

- Increased community volunteers from 12 to 28.
- Installed 5 new benches, 5 new trash cans, and 5 new planters along with 21 decorative flags and 10 hanging baskets along Main Street.
- Had 511 total volunteer hours totaling \$4,704 of donated labor.
- Received \$890 in donations and gifts and generated \$1,203 from festivals

Project Summary

In an effort to enhance the appeal of the Main Street district, the team repaired sidewalks, installed new flags, planters, and benches, and sponsored community festivals to attract tourists and others to their shopping area. The festivals brought the anticipated visitors and the community will continue to explore sustainable methods to attract these shoppers.

“Robinson Park Restoration” – New Straitsville, Ohio

Results

- Park usage increased from 35 to 75 people each day when weather permits and had 15 families using the shelter facility each month.
- No incidents of vandalism during project period and Crime Watch operational.
- Raised \$200 in revenue for the village with additional fundraisers planned.
- Four community groups planned and worked together on this project; they have commitments to continue this collaboration in the future.

Areas of Gain

- Volunteers increased from 15 to 50.
- Leveraged \$4,850 in additional support and donated labor.

Project Summary

In cleaning and restoring an existing community park, New Straitsville was able to increase park usage, eliminate vandalism during the project period, and coordinate larger events within the space. In the spirit of teamwork, they also created a partnership of four local community groups without any previous relationship to work together on the park. While the upkeep of the park will remain a priority, New Straitsville is maneuvering toward the creation of a permanent community center in the vicinity of the park.

“Enrichment Park” - Piketon, Ohio

Results

- Three community groups participate in park usage and upkeep.
- At least 90 people use the park each week.

Areas of Gains

- Volunteer base increased from 10 to 30 people.
- \$2,200 raised through six months of the project.
- 250 volunteer hours contributed totaling in-kind support of \$2,000.

Project Summary

Piketon had a community park, sponsored by US Enrichment, that had fallen into disrepair; because of the appearance and deterioration, residents simply did not use the space. Piketon used their mini-grant to refurbish and improve the park. They repoured broken concrete slabs, made the basketball court useable for recreation, and improved the shelter house so that it would be appealing. A group of senior residents maintained and refreshed attractive planting around the park. A large new piece of playground equipment for younger children was installed and was appealing to parents because it met current safety standards. The sparkplugs plan to eventually build a small stage for concerts and entertainment and to continue to increase the number of community events to generate additional revenue for the town.

“Buffington Island Museum” – Portland, Ohio

Results

- Tourism increases to the museum of over 500/month in August and September.
- Over 75 artifacts donated to the museum by local residents as a demonstration of community pride.

Areas of Gain

- Over \$6,000 raised in cash donations/concessions and \$53,500 raised in-kind from Shelly Material Inc. work at the site.
- Volunteers increased from 10 to 55.

Project Summary

Located on the banks of the Ohio River, Portland and the surrounding area is the site of the final battle of Morgan's Raid. Using the former Portland school building, the Portland Community Center established a museum to accompany the annual battle re-enactment and to operate on its own for tourist and school groups. They have seized upon a great cultural and natural asset of the community and will continue to move forward with developing the museum and the community center.

"Rarden Bulldog" – Rarden, Ohio

Results

- Generated an average of over \$3,000 in revenue for the six months of ACLP.
- Reduced the average number of teens hanging out on a local bridge on weekend nights from 20 to 10 when the Community Center was open.

Areas of Gain

- Volunteer base increased from 10 to 32.
- When the gym opened for events in early September, Rarden had an average of 45 people using the facility each week.
- Had over 1,100 hours of volunteer totaling over \$8,800 in labor costs saved.
- Generated approximately \$29,000 in donated materials including \$24,000 lighting system from GE

Project Summary

Faced with a deteriorating and unused town gymnasium and young people loitering, the community set out to turn the gym into a valuable community asset by remodeling, renovating, and making the space attractive to teenagers. They renovated the floors to create suitable surfaces for basketball and volleyball and the space has a stage for musical and dramatic performances. Rarden has shown tremendous commitment to completing this project and completing it properly as evidenced in their strong fundraising efforts and generous donations. The gymnasium is part of an already completed portion of the community center that houses a group kitchen and large gathering space.

"" – South Webster, Ohio

Results

-

Areas of Gain

-

Project Summary

“Spark in the Park” – Trimble, Ohio

Results

- Vandalism eliminated from the park during the project period, with an approximate savings to the village of \$1,400.
- Had 20 full usage days by community groups (Vacation Bible School, Middle School science class, Boy Scouts, Lions Club).

Areas of Gain

- 58 volunteers worked approximately 400 hours for a cash equivalent of \$3,200.
- Average use of town park rose from 10/day to 25/day.
- Held a Halloween party at the park demonstrating how the park might be used for community-wide celebrations and several people have come forward to offer assistance in planning future events.
- Installed drainage in softball field that dries the field in three days rather than three weeks after heavy rains and floods that are common in Trimble.

Project Summary

Trimble started with a park that had been long neglected and with the help of 58 volunteers, it was transformed into a useable and enjoyable space for everyone in the community. By installing a new drainage system, the park dries much quicker after heavy rain and allows Trimble to more fully utilize the space. New trash receptacles and picnic tables were put into the shelter house and all the park equipment received a fresh coat of paint. The Village will be contributing the funds to complete the remaining phases of the renovation.

“” – Zaleski, Ohio

Results

-

Areas of Gain

-

Project Summary

Lessons Learned

1. All teams need to set at least one economic target that shows an impact on the community's business environment or shows an increase, or decrease (e.g. vandalism), in a local government's revenue stream. Targets focused on participation of volunteers or on use of public parks and recreation facilities are important milestones but usually do not rise to the level of a target. The only case where use of recreation is a target is where it can be demonstrated that community members are choosing recreation over poorer choices like vandalism or mischief.
2. Consider limiting teams to just three targets. Every team in this round had at least 4 and some teams had as many as 6 targets. This many targets can diffuse team efforts and they lose energy to what they and the investor have agreed on as most important. Some teams in this round got off to difficult starts and seemed to get overwhelmed when so many targets still remained. Also, it is much easier to talk about a project if you have one key, well-written target in mind. For example, Rarden wanted to give their children a safe place to be and to get them off the bridge, whereas Trimble wanted to get people to use the town park. While Trimble's intentions were certainly good, they did not present an engaging plan for how they expected people to use the park. We fell into the "If you build it, they will come" trap.
3. We need to make sure that we take enough time for community groups to be clear on long-term visions for their community and then have them articulate how this six-month project fits into that vision. In no way is this to suggest that we require needs assessments or asset inventories, but rather to confirm that each project fits into a larger vision past the Results and Learning workshop.
4. Point #3 in many ways leads to this learning. We need to put some focus on the sustainability of the projects to which we award grants. It must be made clear in the early stages that we are not interested in isolated activities, such as clean-ups, if they cannot be connected with efforts that will immediately follow. Of course, this also must be tempered by the original intention of ACLP to use small mini-grants to take chances on original ideas and the sparkplugs behind those ideas.