

COME TO THE TABLE: LESSONS LEARNED IN RURAL ORANGEBURG COUNTY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lower Orangeburg/Upper Dorchester (LOUD) Initiative started in a small rural African-American Methodist Church, Shady Grove. No one ever guessed that we would be instrumental in setting up four job training programs with career path options at two colleges; training over 400 people; and finding jobs for almost 70% of those individuals.

The purpose of this study is to understand, from LOUD team member's perspectives, what made their team successful in helping rural citizens become trained and gainfully employed. This research will provide a better understanding of what worked with this effort so that our process(es) can be more widely used by other grassroots or faith-based community groups and partnerships for the purpose of serving those left behind by a rapidly changing economy. There are also implications for community colleges in understanding what happened with this team.

THE TABLE: THE COMMUNITY

The LOUD region is adjacent to the "Corridor of Shame," a term used to describe the deplorable economic and education conditions in rural areas located along I-95. A high unemployment and high school dropout rate, in addition to lack of adequate transportation, prevents many local residents from acquiring a job that can create a break in the cycle of poverty. Senator John Matthews called together a team representing private citizens, government agencies, church clergy/members, private industry, and education to work together to address some of the problems in the area. The team was diverse in terms of race, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds.

There was no history of working together in the past, but the pervasive need created a sense of readiness that had never been present before. There were issues of racial barriers initially, but those were managed, especially as trust built among the members.

THE AMBIENCE: EXTERNAL OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Environmental factors that influenced success included: funding from The Duke Endowment; Senator Matthews' leadership and vision; Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College and Trident Technical College's support; internal and external networks of the team members; coaching; and accountability in meeting and reporting requirements.

THE PLACE SETTING: PROCESS OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

The LOUD Team followed the sequential steps in team formation, local leadership was at the table, and a core group emerged. The team developed realistic short- and long-term goals and objectives, implemented their plans, and maintained proper accountability through reports to the team and grant funders. Trust building did occur after some initial problems that were resolved through open communication. Other things mentioned as helpful to the LOUD team was professional development for board members, open communications, and personal passion for the cause.

THE DINERS: PEOPLE SKILLS/CHARACTERISTICS

People skills listed as critical to this team included reliable and dedicated people; willingness to listen, work, and ability to reach consensus; expertise in a skill or profession; and a defined professional or community leader. As the team worked together other characteristics emerged such as friendships outside the partnership developed; a sense of belonging in a divided community; team members who actually "worked" as opposed to "advised;" and continued financial sustainability from other sources of income.

THE SOUS CHEF: THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The two technical college's involvement on the LOUD team was viewed as invaluable. They provided much needed leadership, resources, networks, curriculum, materials, and equipment to the team. They provided classes and participated in graduation ceremonies at remote rural churches to overcome transportation barriers for the students, graduates, and their families. The colleges also reaped benefits from participation by bringing new students to their colleges, adding programs to the curriculum, and additional funds through grants discovered through the LOUD relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

A grassroots team of concerned citizens has positively impacted many people, who had little or no hope of acquiring marketable skills or gainful employment. What are the implications for a broader application of this team's success on other communities along the "Corridor of Shame" and other rural communities?

It is essential, if community colleges are going to become more active in economic development and rely on private industry and grants for funding, that we examine and understand the components of successful partnerships and determine how to strategically align community resources to meet those needs.

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LESSONS LEARNED IN RURAL ORANGEBURG COUNTY
WHITE PAPER

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

-- Margaret Mead

Introduction

The Lower Orangeburg/Upper Dorchester (LOUD) Initiative started five years ago in a small rural African-American Methodist Church, Shady Grove. People from the community, churches, businesses, community colleges, and government agencies came to hear what Senator John Matthews had to say. He had a vision to lift up those who had been left behind by the new economy that favors technology to textiles. He wanted to take the steps to begin a process to end the generational poverty that exists in the area between I-26 and I-95. He told everyone present that day that he could not do it by himself. It would take all of us to make it happen. No one ever guessed that we would be instrumental in setting up four job training programs with career path options at two colleges; training over 400 people; and finding jobs for almost 70% of those individuals (MDC, 2007)

The purpose of this study is to understand, from LOUD team member's perspectives, what made their team successful in helping rural citizens become trained and gainfully employed. I will specifically examine what economic development means in a rural community and how partnerships can assist in economic development activity. I will also use information obtained from literature review and interviews of four key LOUD team members to assess what factors led to success for this particular team; how the team has sustained its current activity and funding; and what was the perceived impact of the community college involvement with the team's success?

The number of people employed, as a percentage of those trained, and the sustainability of the team in terms of continued activity and funding defines success for the purpose of this inquiry. The team has assisted almost 70% of trained graduates in finding employment in career-oriented jobs. The team has continued to exist for over five years and is currently funded at over \$400,000 for the upcoming fiscal year. These funds are from different grants completely separate from the initial funding provided by The Duke Endowment.

This research will provide a better understanding of what worked with this effort so that our process(es) can be more widely used by other grassroots or faith-based community groups and partnerships for the purpose of serving those left behind by a rapidly changing economy. There are also implications for community colleges in understanding what happened with this team. The coach from MDC, Inc., provided by The Duke Endowment, for the LOUD team, Sam Scott said, in a telephone interview, "Of all our projects with the Program for the Rural Carolinas that have been successful, the common footprint has been the presence of the local community college on the team" (personal communication, September 26, 2006). Can lessons learned from this team be applied to other colleges for the purpose of having greater impact on economic development activities and creating wealth for all community members in an area?

Economic Development

Economic development is the process of creating wealth for people, organizations, and communities. It drives not only growth, but sometimes the very existence for a region or community. Economic development is largely dependent on relationships and partnerships. (Porter, 2005; Swager, 2000; The Palmetto Institute, 2006). South Carolina has typically followed the same economic development strategy since the 1950's. The strategy entails marketing and promotion of a low-wage, abundant workforce, plentiful land and infrastructure, and quality of life to attract industries to the state for the purpose of job creation (Porter, 2005).

The strategy has been successful, if the only measure of success is job creation, but in terms of wealth creation, one could argue the strategy has not been as successful. Average wages in South Carolina of \$28,643, were 80.5% of the national average wage of \$35,550 in 2001; manufacturing exports per worker were 16% lower than the national average in 2001, although there was faster growth from 1997 to 2001; and South Carolina employment has grown at a rate of 1.3% annually from 1990 to 2001 compared to a national growth rate of 1.5%. (Porter, 2005)

Additionally, the strategy of pursuing job creation for a low wage workforce is no longer effective with the emergence of even lower wage competition in China, India, and Mexico. Prosperity remains elusive for most South Carolina citizens. In order to grow wealth for South Carolina residents, a new economic development strategy is required. Recent studies commissioned by the South Carolina Governor's office (Porter, 2005) and The Palmetto Institute (2006) have indicated a need for collaboration among many entities to include private industry, education, community members, and government agencies for the purpose of defining and implementing that strategy and, ultimately, changing the economic development culture. Both studies emphasized the need for groups who have never worked together previously to come together to solve the problems, such as high dropout rate of high school students and academically under prepared students for higher education and job opportunities that exist.

Community Colleges and Economic Development

Thanki (1999) states higher education institutions are essential to economic development because higher education, as a producer of knowledge, has the capability to link global perspectives to local frameworks. Community colleges serve many roles through job creation and training, but also by educating people in the community. They make direct contributions such as training and educating the workforce, professional development of supervisors and managers, and providing contractual training, covering a myriad of topics, for the companies' continued operations (Keane and Allison, 1999).

Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) state the impact the institution has on economic development depends on what type of institution it is and the nature of the local region itself. Higher education institutions impact more than employment and local spending. They also make indirect contributions to local economies. The more accessible an institution is perceived as being, the larger contribution it is making to the social and cultural infrastructure within a community. Regardless of the type of institution, having a higher education institution appears to influence business location decisions (Pappas, 1997).

Community and technical colleges have been the most successful at economic development efforts because they are most aware of the needs of their local communities (Proenza, 2002). Community colleges are often the interface between local residents' ability to secure and grow in a job and ability of the business and industry to develop and hire a workforce (Education Commission of the States Center for Community College Policy, 2002). Twenty-four community colleges were the focus of a six-year study called the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) to determine the impact colleges have on rural economic development efforts. They typically had a base of leadership, resources, and networks to initiate and promote change in their communities. Some were more successful than others, but they all were the central component to sustained economic development activity and change (Rubin, 2001; RCCI, 2002).

Porter (2005) listed the South Carolina technical college system as an asset to the business environment of the state; however, in the same report listed one of the challenges facing the state as a "lack of cluster councils and university-industry linking organizations" (Porter, 2005, p.11). Additionally, key themes emerged from an in-depth study of four South Carolina career clusters, which included limited investment in education, skills, and research and minimal participation of private industry and higher education in economic development activities, to include partnerships (Porter, 2005).

Partnerships: The New Paradigm

Funding is the driving force of the increased interest in partnerships, especially in higher education. Universities and colleges have had to seek alternative funding streams from the private sector, grants, and partnerships because of cuts from traditional sources, such as state appropriations. (Harloe & Perry, 2004). Additionally, universities and colleges are expected to be a part of their communities as characterized in their mission (Anyon & Fernandez, 2007). Working with other groups and people should be a natural and easy thing to do considering those benefits, but it is not that simple. Partnership is defined as: "Collaborations characterized by the shared and long-term commitment of a diverse group of members to achieving a common goal" (Johns, Kilpatrick, & Whelan, 2007, p. 51).

Johns et al. (2007) used categories of predictors, processes, and people to categorize how partnerships develop, evolve, and sustain themselves. I will follow her framework to organize and present partnership information and findings later. Rural communities, to include community colleges, have limited resources which predisposes them to consider partnership options to address the needs that exist in the community.

There is no one “best way” to create and sustain a partnership. It is often an fine balance of having the right people in the right place that determines the success of a partnership to create economic development for a region (Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), 2002). Characteristics of effective partnerships include a case-by-case approach because no collaboration is the same, so a “cookie cutter” approach will not be successful. This is important to note from a community college perspective because each of them are identified as individual, even in adjoining counties and within a state (Prigge, 2005).

Predictors of Success

The ability to have and create networks and relationships is critical to eventual success. Each entity must realize mutual benefits to ensure long-term success (Prigge, 2005; RCCI, 2002). The element of trust between and among parties cannot be emphasized enough. Relationships provide information that can rarely be obtained elsewhere, especially in smaller communities. Spending time developing relationships is critical to building trust and gaining access (Anyon & Fernandez, 2007). A presence of higher education institutions includes high level of awareness of external needs, interaction with other entities, and common ground. An understanding of tacit knowledge – the local practices, culture, and networks, which are not easily measured – provides a competitive advantage to a region participating in collaborative efforts (Keane & Allison, 1999).

Funding is important to get the partnership to coalesce and move forward and to leverage additional monies from public and private sources. Initial funding can often lead to more commitments in additional funding or in-kind contributions, of time, knowledge, space, equipment, and commitment, which leads to sustainability. The search for additional funds is never ending and necessary. (Anyon & Fernandez, 2007; Jones et al., 2007; RCCI, 2002). Other predictors include shared goals, strong leadership, outside coaching/facilitation a assistance, and trust among the partners (Jones et al., 2007; RCCI, 2002).

Process of Development

The first step in team development is strategic planning. A vision and goals and objectives are necessary to get a team unified behind a cause. Planning provides the structure to develop activities to create success (RCCI, 2002). Goals and objective

should be broad and flexible initially until specific actions have occurred to allow adjustments by the team (Anyon & Fernandez, 2007; Jones et al., 2007; RCCI, 2002). Achieving success early is important to giving team members something to “rally” around, so framing goals to be achievable and manageable is needed for sustainability (RCCI, 2002). Ongoing evaluation and assessment of progress and process is important to maintain accountability, especially with funding sources. (Anyon & Fernandez, 2007; Jones et al., 2007). Other influences of team development include local needs, professional development of team members, and continuity among core team members, meaning turnover is minimized, especially in the beginning stages (Jones, et al., 2007).

People

The human element is the most unpredictable, but necessary, component of partnerships. Leadership is mentioned most often in literature as a fundamental component of team success. Partnerships that have been designated as “successful” in research had multiple leaders with the characteristics of commitment, consistent player, the ability to share the leadership role, trusted, local, strong interpersonal skills, and visionary (Jones, et al., 2007; RCCI, 2002). Interpersonal skills include negotiation, meeting facilitation, networking, communication, and engaging other community leaders (Jones et al., 2007).

The LO/UD-Shady Grove Project

One area of South Carolina that was identified as being left behind, economically, was the Lower Orangeburg and Upper Dorchester (LOUD) counties region (MDC, 2007). The poverty in the area serves as a glaring contrast to the bountiful resources of Charleston, only 60 miles south of the region, and the large manufacturing base located in the City of Orangeburg, only twenty-five miles to the north. The region is adjacent to I-26 and I-95, right along the “Corridor of Shame”, a term used to describe the deplorable economic and education conditions in rural areas located along I-95 (Lessons Learned, 2007; Beaufort Gazette, October 20, 2007; MDC, Inc., 2007). A high unemployment and high school dropout rate, in addition to lack of adequate transportation, prevents many local residents from acquiring a job that can create a break in the cycle of poverty (MDC, 2007).

Senator John Matthews became aware of a privately funded grant being offered through the Duke Endowment for rural economic development in 2002. He called together a team representing private citizens, government agencies, church clergy/members, private industry, and education. The team was diverse in terms of race, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds, as well. The purpose of the faith-based initiative, through funding from the Duke Endowment, was to provide opportunity to those in the LO/UD area who were un- or under-employed for the purpose of creating wealth in an economically depressed rural location (MDC, 2007).

Initial goals for the team included increasing employment and income, develop community leadership, and develop community resources and structures to pursue economic renewal and development (MDC, 2007). The team utilized Trident Technical College (TTC) and Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College (OCTC) to develop job training programs in healthcare, manufacturing, truck driving, and entrepreneurship. The colleges and the teams utilized many community resources such as Adult Education, job service centers, called One Stop Centers, DSS, and local employers to help a variety of educational needs for citizens. They continue to work on developing local leadership and resources in the region to create economic revitalization (MDC, 2007).

Funding with the Duke Endowment grant ended almost eighteen months ago, but because the group has been effective in terms of training and employment goals met, they have successfully applied for and received non-profit (501c3) status and obtained additional grants to keep funding levels and economic development activity, to include training and job placement, at sustainable levels (Senator John Matthews, personal communications, October 31, 2007).

Methodology

Interviews

This study utilized interviews from four key partners of the LOUD Team. I selected the interviewees based on their current involvement with the team (Spradley, 1979), in addition to their tenure, their role, and their contributions to the team. I interviewed:

1. **Senator John W. Matthews**, who initiated the original Duke Endowment grant and hand-picked this team. He continues to provide vision and leadership for the group.
2. **Reverend Dr. John Elliott**, who is the pastor of Shady Grove United Methodist Church and has served as the team leader/moderator for five years.
3. **Ms. Kim Sturgeon**, who is the Assistant VP of Development at Trident Technical College and the team administrator.
4. **Mr. Garon Jackson**, who is the Executive Director of the LOUD Shady Grove Community Development Corporation. He is the case manager for the community members served by the group. He has first-hand knowledge of many of the lives those we have impacted.

I asked each person if they would be willing to be interviewed for no more than one hour to ensure the time commitment was clear. I told them I would meet with them on the date, time, and location they selected. Each interview was held separately. Three were conducted in my office and Sturgeon's was held at Shady Grove Methodist Church

to minimize her travel time from Charleston. I deferred to their preferences every time (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

I developed a series of questions that addressed the framework of partnerships to include predictors, processes, and people (Johns et al., 2007) and questions related to a study that examined characteristics of high performing higher education governing boards (Kezar, 2006). I also added a question regarding the impact of the community colleges on the team's performance. The interview questions served as a guideline. I used a digital voice recorder to capture the interview so that I could focus on the interviewee, their responses, and make them feel as comfortable as possible. I later transcribed three interviews completely and one interview, which was not as rich in data, as needed for the purposes of this report.

Rapport and Subjectivity

Having been a member of the team for five years, I am very familiar with and hold a deep respect for the people I interviewed. I knew this could be a potential issue with my research. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) address the issue of "over-rapport" which can create a loss of objectivity and bias with regard to subjectively selecting participants, being denied access to sources because of friendship with others, and over-identification with the interviewees. I was cognizant of the potential research issues related to my research; however, I also feel that I can be objective because my relationship with the interviewees is professional. I do not socialize or know them in any other context than community and economic development related to the team.

"The goal is to get as fully possible in touch with the embodied self who performs the act of research" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 106). I made a conscious effort to minimize my comments regarding the team during the interviews. In reading the transcripts, I feel confident I did not change the context or meaning of the interview or its data. I feel enough rapport was there to allow the data I collected to be rich with information regarding rural partnerships.

Data Analysis

I listened to the interviews, created transcripts, and read the transcripts without taking any notes. I went back to the transcripts and began to create categories that emerged from the conversations. After I was satisfied by the categories that emerged, I went back again and placed notes within each category of who had said what as it related to that category by placing the line of sequence from the transcript for easy cross-reference. Since I had grouped my questions based on Johns' et al. (2007) framework for rural partnerships, I then took the categories and noted statements and

tried to categorize them again to fit within the framework used by Johns et al. (2007), showing Predictors, Partnership Development, and People. I then created another category for Community Colleges. "Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

I will present my findings, but one thing that became very apparent to me when I was analyzing the data was the numerous times the phrase "at the table" or "come to the table" was used. In three complete transcripts, it was used a combined forty-eight times. The statement is something I would like to follow-up with the interviewees about their use of the phrase, but my inference of the context in which it was used was that it means to come together as equals to work as partners to solve problems. That was why I named this project "Come To The Table". It has many subtle meanings, related to church and cultural symbolism that are worthy of further investigation.

Findings and Discussion

The purpose of the following discussion is to feature the issues and observations of team members presented in the interviews associated with the development and sustainability the LOUD Team to assist those left behind obtain not only employment, but hope for a career path, to lead to a better way of life for the participants and the community. I will also provide examples from the interviews.

The interviews I conducted were revealing because each person interviewed is a key member of the LOUD Initiative, but they each brought a unique perspective of the team. Senator Matthews' perspective was very broad. He sees how this team and its success fit into other possible partnership opportunities within his districts and the state. Kim Sturgeon has the next high-level view, as the team administrator and a technical college employee from Charleston, she has to interface with all team participants regularly and her perspective is broader than the Orangeburg community because she is an outsider looking in. Her reference points are different, which makes her data very insightful and relevant.

Garon knows the participants we have helped. He knows his job and he does it well. His awareness of the subtleties associated with the team is less insightful than Kim and Rev. Elliott's perspectives. Reverend Elliott is a figurehead in the Orangeburg African-American community. He knows everybody and everybody knows him. He is more aware of the interconnections between the local players on the team, but not beyond Orangeburg. He does not know some of the day-to-day operations that Kim and Garon Jackson know however.

Predictors of Success

Funding is the main incentive to get people to listen and become interested in a potential project. Without the funding possibility from Duke, it is unlikely a team would have formed. The amount and length of funding from The Duke Endowment was \$150,000 annually for three years, which was enough to make potential partners pay attention. Team members need to see the benefit of why they are participating in a partnership. If there is a clear benefit to the member individually or organizationally, they are more likely to be an active member. Understanding the potential benefits of participating leads to a sense of commitment. Partners on a team have to feel a sense of dedication and buy-in regarding why they are dedicating time and energy to the partnership.

Trident Technical College (TTC) was interested in playing a large role with the project because they do not have a campus in Dorchester County; they value Senator Matthews' legislative support; and the college president saw future relationships with large names like The Duke Endowment, which has occurred separately from the project. They dedicated 25% of one employee's time, for a nominal fee, to the project, which does not include other TTC employee's time and in-kind contributions (K. Sturgeon, personal communication, October 11, 2007).

Presenting a vision that everyone believes and can rally around is important. Senator Matthews' is passionate about helping the forgotten population within his districts and he knows no one can do that but members of the same community. "We've got to get out there and save ourselves. And really when you can convince a group of people..to do something to bring about change in their community..they are committed to it" (J. Matthews, personal communication, October 31, 2007).

A catalyst, a leader, who inspires and initiates action, is necessary. Senator Matthews used his knowledge of the community and his political capital to bring people together, at least in the beginning. He had the clout to reach agency heads, college presidents, plant managers, clergy leaders, and other politicians to listen to the proposal and make a commitment to help. He has good relations with most community leaders, so his networking skills allowed him to bring a team together that was diverse in gender, race, and professional occupation.

Relationships the team members have with others outside the team serves two purposes. One, it allows the team to have access to people who can help with specific projects or goals. Two, it can aid in the process of recruiting new team members helps the team get started and sustain activity because the collective knowledge within the team broadens the ability to tap others with certain skills, information, or jobs.

Objective third party coaching provided by MDC, Inc. was also listed as a component of success for the team. There were significant racial barriers that existed from within the community and an incident that occurred early on the team with one member. It was noted by Sturgeon that the “coach”, who served as facilitator early in the process and cheerleader later, provided an objective set of eyes and ears for the team. He was technical and emotional support for the team. Sturgeon felt “safe” talking to and running things by him because she did not know anyone from the community, as most team members did. He helped keep the team focused, on track, and motivated. He has since opened the doors for other grant opportunities the team would have never known about that has allowed the team to continue their work beyond Duke funding.

Support from an institution of higher education was invaluable in terms of time, resources, materials and supplies, credibility, training programs, and relationships with industry to find jobs for participants. The community college provided reputable training programs for the participants. In one instance, it allowed industry to develop the curriculum with the understanding they would guarantee an interview, not a job, to graduates of the program, if they had an opening at their facility. “A lot of programs don’t have that connection with their colleges, so a lot of them stalled by the wayside” (G. Jackson, personal communication, October 12, 2007).

“If you look at all the factors that influenced the outcomes of our programs...the one that had the greatest impact was the community college because they are the ones who are carrying the program out and measuring. I think the lesson out of this for the community college is that they got to do the normal process of job training and working with industry, but they went down to another grassroots level to pick up those people who have been left behind” (J. Matthews, personal communication, October 31, 2007).

The last predictor of success for a partnership is early success in meeting goals. The turning point for the LOUD Team was the first class of Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) graduation ceremony. The team could see the excitement and hope felt by the graduates at the ceremony and dinner that followed. “I remember there being a change...enthusiasm and sort of commitment among the players once we had that first graduation. I think everybody got a little more excited” (K. Sturgeon, personal communication, October 11, 2007).

When asked about whether another team could read about the LOUD Team and experience the same results, everyone interviewed said it could be done, but it takes everything listed above to happen. One interviewee noted that thirty teams were given the same funding and time period to accomplish what we did, but The Duke Endowment considered only five teams successful. What went wrong with the other twenty-five teams?

Partnership Development

What are the factors that lead to team formation and sustainability once everyone is “around the table”? The ability to strategically plan, to include developing programs that mesh with the communities’ needs, making program changes, and identifying future team members was described as essential to team development. Communication of the team’s strategies and goals to community members and assigning tasks so that everyone feels they belong and has a role on the team were also list as activities needed for team development. Having a personal passion for the cause was mentioned more than once, to include doing more than is actually required, such as making calls to potential employers, attending graduation after normal working hours, and making sacrifices, such as meeting a class on Saturday to make sure everything is going well.

The interviewees noted that new members were needed, especially as the strategic direction of the team evolves; however, they all emphasized the need to maintain continuity with the core members. Core members appear to be the subsection of members that have been on the team from the first day. The need for an orientation program to explain the history of the team and how it has evolved was described as critically important. Each person was adamant however, that there be continuity within the core team to ensure the values and ideals of the group remain. A strategic rotation plan was suggested for getting “new blood”, but maintaining the intent of the original group. One concern was mentioned by Senator Matthews that rotation of members is ideal, but not always possible in a community with limited resources.

Professional development training was provided regularly when under The Duke Endowment. That is something that has been neglected more in the last year, but was mentioned as a factor in making the team more effective. This training could include orientation to the team, legal responsibilities and liabilities of board members, since the group is a non-profit corporation now, and technical information regarding meeting protocol, such as Robert’s Rules of Order and basic interpersonal skills.

People

Team members were mentioned as critical to the process of team formation. When asked what three attributes a team member should possess, answers included reliable and dedicated; interpersonal skills to include willingness to listen, work, and achieve consensus; expertise in a skill or profession, such as accounting, personnel, or training; and leadership. It is important to find people who are viewed as leaders either in their job, church, school, or community.

Everyone interviewed for this project said they had never been on a team that performed as well as this one had. This team had been the professional and personal exception to the rule. Reasons given for it being a notable experience included

friendships made, a sense of belonging in a divided community, team members actually “work” instead of advise, and financial support to allow the team to continue working. “I’ve been on other boards where it would look nice on my resume, but they aren’t passionate about really digging in to do work to make sure it happens” (K. Sturgeon, personal communication, October 31, 2007).

Community College

The involvement of the two community colleges is noteworthy for several reasons. The colleges have assigned territories in South Carolina and rarely work together. There is competition between them for funding based on headcount. The LOUD partnership has allowed the two colleges to create a model for working together to share “headcount” and revenues from the training projects. The issue of the community college involvement was directly addressed in each interview and each interviewee said the colleges were a major force in the success in the team because they had resources no one else “at the table” had to offer. They had the capacity to provide administrative support and leadership. The presidents of both colleges have committed significant human resource capital, time, materials, and even furniture to the project.

The colleges have extensive networks of relationships with other entities that have been able to help such as Adult Education, business and industry leaders, and other non-profit agencies. They extend the web beyond even Senator Matthews’ reach, which benefits the project. They have been able to use those contacts to bring more partners to the team, provide advise to the curriculum of classes offered, and to obtain more grant funding.

The colleges have provided human resource professionals to assist with personnel matters associated with the team, public relations staff have assisted with advertisement and brochure design, and many in-kind contributions to include time and furniture. The colleges have provided their workforce development training expertise to create relevant training programs for LOUD, career paths for participants, and direct access to jobs through business and industry contacts.

The colleges have reaped benefits from their association with LOUD, as well. Both colleges have received substantial grants because of their involvement with LOUD. They have been exposed to new partners and ideas they never would have known if they stayed on their respective campuses. Additionally, both colleges have reached out to a subsection of the population they would have never reached through traditional marketing efforts. They have shown thos individuals they can finish a class and can finish additional studies, if they choose. This has enormous potential to each college. “They have allowed us to continue doing what we’re doing as far as training.

Without them, there would honestly be no LOUD” (G. Jackson, personal communication, October 12, 2007).

Conclusion

It is almost impossible not to read about the high school dropout rate, the lack of skilled workforce, and the level of poverty that exists in South Carolina, especially the “Corridor of Shame”, which is where the LOUD region is located. A grassroots team of concerned citizens has positively impacted many people, who had little or no hope of acquiring marketable skills or gainful employment. What are the implications for a broader application of this team’s success on other communities along the “Corridor of Shame” and other rural communities?

It is essential, if community colleges are going to become more active in economic development and rely on private industry and grants for funding, that we examine and understand the components of successful partnerships and determine how to strategically align community resources to meet those needs.

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