

Aligning Leadership Programs with Community Development

Daniel Kahl, Community and Leadership Development

Aligning the content and activities of a leadership program with the intended outcomes for the participants, stakeholders, and broader community is important for several reasons. First, it allows the program host organization to know that their time, resources, and energy expenditures are having the payback they intended. Second, providing a clear link between program activities and intended outcomes allows the program evidence of its value, which helps with recruitment and program sustainability. Finally, because community leadership programs often exist to serve the greater good of the community residents, having measurable outcomes is important to the overall well-being of the community. This publication will help community leaders who oversee a community-based leadership development program to align their leadership development with community development. For community leaders thinking of starting a leadership program, this publication is a valuable resource for providing focus and identifying desired program content.

What Characterizes a Community Leadership Program?

Community-based leadership programs tend to be developed and directed for a local audience. The program may be targeted to serve a single community, a county, or a multicounty population. Local program efforts typically focus on improving the leadership skills for people living in the geographic area the program serves. Recruit-

ment of program participants comes from the program service area, and the overall targeted impacts are typically focused on local networking and awareness building. Typically, community leadership programs are overseen by Cooperative Extension or Chambers of Commerce, however, other sponsoring organizations or supervisory collaborations do exist.

Community Leadership Programs have heightened benefit for:

- People newer to the community
- Younger participants
- Female participants
- Participants earning under \$100,000 annually
- Participants without a college degree

—Apaliyah et al.

How Is Community Leadership Different from Other Approaches to Leadership?

A focus on shared or collaborative leadership may mean that community leadership programs shift from a philosophy of developing individual leaders to approaches that strengthen collaborative leadership skills. While sports teams, business, and industry typically focus on a competitive approach to leadership, community leadership ap-

proaches tend to embrace more collaborative leadership models. Shared leadership and collaborative leadership are approaches to leadership based on the assumption that sustainable group success requires strong relationships and high levels of trust. Social change leadership, as described by Rost, asserts a focus on civic leadership necessary for a community to achieve the sharing of ideas and use of resources for the common good. Rost identified three primary elements of social change leadership: 1) a vision and direction of intended change, 2) the collaborative efforts, knowledge, and resources of those involved, and 3) action on behalf of society, not action in pursuit of individual goals. The social change leadership theory has been influential in framing the concept of civic leadership, especially in context of community leadership development programs.

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The concept of civic leadership represents more than power sharing by authority figures. Civic leadership approaches support the people of the community to act in the interests of the broader community. Allen, Morton, and Li define shared leadership as “the co-creation of an environment by a group of individuals, organizations, and communities with the intent to accomplish a common vision and collaborative goals.”

Civic or community-based leadership philosophies are helpful when designing effective community leadership programs. A focus on community-based leader-

Community leadership programs tend to utilize the collaborative approaches to leadership development because they support the reduction of internal rivalries, expand community networking, are believed to aid community cooperation, and enhance community well-being.

ship shifts the emphasis from developing individual leaders to a focus on creating opportunities for community members to participate in shared goal setting and problem solving.

How Community Leadership Development Supports Community Development

Community-based leadership programs have the potential to build the leadership capacity of participants and strengthen community. When leadership programs design opportunities for engaging citizens in community issue identification and action, they advance both leadership and community development. The creation of opportunities for inclusion and voice in community decisions is a core aspect of self-help community development practice. As Littrell and Littrell summarize, “Community development is rooted in basic democratic philosophy. All people have both the right and responsibility to create and recreate a community that enhances its members’ collective for self-governance, self-determination and self-help. Community development occurs when people’s collective capacity for self-direction is enhanced or increased.”

In looking at the outcomes of leadership programs, Pigg et al. reflected an increase and positive correlation between social cohesion (how connected people are in the community), civic engagement (volunteering and civic group participation), and community action (people acting together to improve their quality of life) in leadership program graduates. Their research indicated that community leadership programs can serve as vehicles for improving all three of these areas, thereby strengthening community while developing leadership capacity. By engaging leadership class participants to test their skills by actually convening community members, leadership programs can foster participant skill development and community engagement. Class members can convene community members or facilitate involvement with civic groups and social organizations. Com-

munity engagement can support residents in option identification, prioritization, and community decision-making. A well-designed leadership program will support the learning of the class members as they strengthen their community. By purposefully designing engagement processes, community leadership programs can become active leadership learning laboratories that support community growth and expand the base of citizen leaders in the community.

Engaging citizens to participate in community issue identification and action is a key element of both leadership and community development.

What Are Potential Outcomes of an Effective Community Leadership Program?

Community leadership programs should be developed with attention to how the program contributes to individual growth, and to the overall well-being of the community. While program priorities vary, common reasons for hosting community leadership development programs may include goals for participants, organizations, and the broader community benefit (Table 1). Once desired outcomes are determined, the leadership program can begin to design the activities within the program to reach these goals.

Designing an Effective Community Leadership Program to Achieve Results

Designing a community leadership program often begins by identifying the intended program outcomes. Assessing leadership program needs can begin by convening and listening to leadership program stakeholders. For resources or assistance with stakeholder identification or with developing a leadership program needs assessment, contact the CEDIK office at the University of Kentucky.

With careful planning, community leadership programs can help participants build individual capacity. When done well, the leadership program will also improve relationships, strengthen community organizations, enhance community networks, and improve the capacity of citizens as they work together to address common issues.

Table 1. Goals for participants, organizations, and the community		
Individual Goals	Organizational Goals	Community Goals
Increased knowledge and understanding of self	Strengthened social and professional networks, expanded business relations	Increased knowledge of community operations and systems
Increased understanding of others	Enhanced community relationships	Increased active commitment and investment in the local community
Improved confidence for working with others	Improved collaboration within the organization	Improved social capital or social cohesion
Improvement in leadership skills (communication, collaboration, problem solving, resolving conflict, guiding change, etc.)	Improved collaboration with other organizations	Strengthened civic involvement or increased community involvement



References

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For additional assistance with planning public forums in Kentucky, contact the CEDIK office:

**Community and Economic Development
Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK)**
College of Agriculture, Food and
Environment
University of Kentucky
419 Charles E. Barnhart Building
Lexington, KY 40546-0276
(859) 257-7272
email: cedik@lsv.uky.edu
website: cedik.ca.uky.edu