

Leadership Asheville 28 Leadership Learning Team (LLT) Project Descriptions – Indicators

Civic vitality is the combined influence of a community's commitment, resources and skills that can be deployed to build on community strengths and address community problems and opportunities. Commitment refers to the community-wide will to act, based on a shared awareness of problems, opportunities and workable solutions. Real, lasting community change is built around knowing where you are, where you want to be, and whether your efforts are making a difference. Indicators are a necessary ingredient for sustainable change. And the process of selecting community indicators -- who chooses, how they choose, what they choose -- is as important as the data you select.

An indicator is an actual activity or capacity that you can measure or assess in some way that shows that an outcome is being achieved. You can think of an indicator as one step you must take if you want to claim that an outcome has been attained.

All of LA 28's LLT projects relate to community indicators. More specifically, each LLT focused on developing a set of measurements that are typically associated with the category of civic vitality. These measurements are extremely important because they will help us better understand the community as a system and how it might be improved.

- **Competitive Edge in Civic Vitality** – Civic vitality reflects the quality of social infrastructure— networks of organizations and institutions, community gathering places, bonds of friendship and neighborliness, civility and collegiality, access to information, opportunities for civic and electoral engagement, philanthropic giving —that together create a welcoming, engaged, informed, and inclusive society. The indicator that this team chose to research was recreation in Asheville. The team drew from statistical data and personal interviews to highlight the strengths & weaknesses that Asheville possesses in. In particular, the group compared the opportunities in this area to several other cities. Recreation is an important measurement to determine civic vitality because it illuminates a community activity that directly correlates to the quality of social infrastructure.
 - **Team:** Lew Bleiweis, Dave Carr, Emi Kubota, Jo Peterson Gibbs, Marcia Whitney.

- **High Rates of Social Capital** - Social capital refers to the network of associations, relationships and affiliations that connect individuals and families to communities. A city or region with a high rate of social capital can draw on it as a resource to promote volunteerism, civic engagement, philanthropy, voter participation, and mutual aid, and to mobilize and regroup during emergencies. In the area of volunteerism, this LLT identified organizations that currently track stats/demographics and their measurements. They also developed a mock-up website that could be used as a tool and reporting platform for these and other indicators.
 - **Team:** Wayne Butler, Leslie Elliott, Jana Lechner, Michael Trayford.

- **Demographically Representative Leadership** – Racial and gender diversity in elected leadership is a key measure of the value of diverse voices in civic life and breadth of a community's political decision-making capacity. If all leaders are of a single color, ethnicity, linguistic group, gender, age, level of physical ability or sexual orientation, it is highly unlikely that a community will succeed in recruiting talented individuals and, instead, will draw on too narrow a range of experience to be truly effective. This team analyzed the data showing the race, gender and age of elected officials in Asheville. Additionally, diversity in business leadership ensures that the best strategies for growth in an increasingly competitive economy can be developed and executed. Businesses also make many important contributions to community life. Diversity of

leadership in the business arena increases civic vitality and equality. The team also looked at the demographics of the leaders in major employers in Asheville.

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- **Healthy Race and Community Relations** - A healthy community is where people come together to make their community better for themselves, their family, their friends, their neighbors, and others. A healthy community creates ongoing dialogue, generates leadership opportunities for all, embraces diversity, connects people and resources, fosters a sense of community, and shapes its future. The team researched perceptions and attitudes held by citizens in Asheville with regard to race and its role in the community. They also wanted to see what type of opportunities existed for different races and how the city itself addresses race within the context of community relations. This team hosted group discussions with multi-racial residents and leaders in the diversity arena, surveyed twenty leaders, co-workers, friends, and neighbors to solicit broader views and also conducted interviews with individuals associated with on-going activities in race relations.

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- **Welcoming and Inclusive Environment** - Public amenities such as parks and cultural venues, as well as government offices, shopping centers, human service agencies, subways, and neighborhood shops should be accessible to Asheville residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. The indicator that this LLT assessed was whether public parking facilities in Asheville are accessible to people with disabilities. Universal accessibility is essential to creating an inclusive community. There is a growing movement to apply the principles of universal design to public spaces. Elements of this design—which include entryways without stairs, wide doors and halls, lever door handles and the use of icons as well as text in signage—ensure that products, environments, and communications respond to the needs of the widest possible array of users. This includes access to education, employment and voting. Without accessibility in design, a significant portion of Asheville residents would be prohibited from contributing to the area’s civic vitality.

➤ **Team:** Susan Garrett, Dena Gettleman, Blaine Greenfield, Jeremy Jordan, Hayley Roper.

- **Access to Information** – Radio and television play an important role in the community by providing entertainment and information. Both media are able to furnish immediate information about the local community and broadcast emergency information as necessary. These media become trusted sources of information by using a consistent format and familiar personalities. Both radio and television are thriving businesses due to their adaptability to other technologies. Both have a presence on the internet, utilize satellite communications, and can be accessed through mobile device applications. As technology advances the portability and accessibility of radio and television are increasing, and this has increased dependence on these media. This LLT created a set of data that identified what information is available, where it can be found and, when available, the level at which the community is accessing each particular source.

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- **Strength of the Nonprofit Sector** - Nonprofit organizations both reflect and foster a healthy civic life. Asheville’s varied nonprofit sector is a source of cultural vitality, an expression of social capital, and a valuable adjunct to community life. Often referred to as the “third” or “independent” sector, nonprofits are frequently better positioned than corporations or

governments to create innovative responses to community challenges and opportunities. Partly as a consequence, nonprofit organizations here and in other parts of the country have assumed some of the former responsibilities of government, especially in support of society's most vulnerable populations.

On the other hand, a community can have too many staffed nonprofit organizations and institutions at the expense of local connections and capacity, or social capital. Community-based organizations and nonprofit institutions today are facing cuts in public revenues and foundation funding. It is impossible for the nonprofit sector alone to meet rising needs. Sustaining a strong nonprofit sector—and civic health—during difficult times requires the generosity, assistance and engagement of the whole community. In the wake of the recession, current economic uncertainty coupled with the lag time in reporting of nonprofit financial data hinders our understanding of the sector's stability in real time. This LLT analyzed the number of non-profit organizations in the community, categorized them, and also asked local leaders about the future of non-profits in the city.

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- **Public Support and Philanthropy** – While neighborliness, networks of families and friends, informal groups, volunteer participation and civic dialogue are the foundations of civil society, formal organizations are often the building blocks and nonprofit organizations and institutions require financial support to fulfill their missions. The nonprofit sector is affected both by the assets of foundations and by revenues from the public sector. In constrained economic times, declines in philanthropic assets and giving or declines in tax revenues can affect the nonprofit sector profoundly. The third leg of the stool of public support for nonprofits is individual philanthropic giving and individual support through volunteering—both important aspects of social capital. Most nonprofits cannot rely on any one leg of their financial and community support and seek a variety of sources to diversify their funding base. This LLT researched the different areas of public and philanthropic support in our region, using indicators such as: In- and out-of-state grants, personal philanthropic support for the nonprofit sector, and assets and grants of regional foundations.

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