

# Community Heart & Soul®



## How To Create Stronger, Healthier and More Vibrant Small Cities and Towns







## We Believe in Your Community

I grew up in Weston, Vermont, population 600, and served on the Planning Commission many years ago.

I observed most residents didn't get involved in town affairs until something controversial came along. We on the

Planning Commission updated the Town Plan, a nearly year-long process where we invited public participation which was scant.

Hardly a year had passed when a developer proposed an "educational center" five miles north of town on the upper side of a mountain. In actuality, it turned out to be an amusement park with numerous rides and the added attraction of an African animal park and was called Wildlife Wonderland.

The town became divided over it. Friendships were strained, enemies created, legal challenges exchanged, and an air of unpleasantness hung over the town.

An appeal resulted in exchanging the wildlife animals with farm animals. The theme park opened in the spring and went bankrupt in October. The scars on the mountain healed faster than the scars among the residents.

This troubled me for years and over time **Community Heart & Soul emerged as a better way for small cities and towns to make decisions about their future.**

Community Heart & Soul is premised on the notion that all small cities and towns have a distinct Heart & Soul. It's those elements that residents love about their town, the pride they feel, the places they love and show visitors, the gathering places, and a way of doing business that rises above political ideologies and views residents as friends and neighbors who will work together.

And it's led by all residents in partnership with their elected and appointed officials.



Small cities and towns have faced numerous challenges since WWII chasing the silver-bullet approach to economic development. You know, get a factory to move to town and the problems are solved. Didn't work out so well.



**With Heart & Soul, towns get their confidence back and when that happens people do amazing things** and economic development emerges more from within. You will see some examples in the pages that follow.

After an initial two years of learning, your town's Heart & Soul becomes an ongoing practice for years to come. It does not sit on a shelf. There are a growing number of Heart & Soul towns and lines of exchange of ideas among them are being established.

**As most Heart & Soul towns say, this was the greatest investment we ever made** and it's paying off with new energy, an amazing increase in the number of volunteers, more individuals running for office, and pride in rebuilding our own economy.

**Lyman Orton**

*Founder, Community Heart & Soul  
Proprietor, The Vermont Country Store*

“With Heart & Soul, towns get their confidence back and when that happens **people do amazing things and economic development emerges.**”







## Every Town Has a Heart and Soul That Reflects What Residents Love About Their Community and Why They Choose to Live There

Community Heart & Soul is a resident-driven process that engages the entire population of a town in identifying what they love most about their community, what future they want for it, and how to achieve it. **Organized into four phases, the step-by-step process is led by a Certified Coach who guides a community through the Heart & Soul process.**

Community Heart & Soul is the foundation upon which a town produces long-lasting benefits that live on, long term...in the heartbeat of your community. **Community Heart & Soul is a practice, adopted by each town that continues long into the future.** A town's Heart & Soul connects the human elements of residents with the governance elements of elected and appointed officials.





## Three powerful principles guide the Heart & Soul model:

### Involve Everyone

Hearing from all residents, especially those whose voices are hidden or missing, is a priority throughout the Community Heart & Soul process.

### Focus on What Matters Most

When residents share what they love about where they live and identify their hopes for the future, common themes emerge. These are the things that matter most to residents and become the foundation for sound decision-making.



### Play the Long Game

Community Heart & Soul is just the beginning of an evolutionary way towns view themselves, how they govern, and how they make decisions about the future. Communities are equipped for the long run with the skills and tools to continue doing business guided by what matters most—their community's Heart & Soul.

**Community Heart & Soul reaches deep into communities to ensure all voices are represented in determining a town's future.**

Instead of bringing residents to the table, Community Heart & Soul brings the table to residents at community events, neighborhood block parties, schools, businesses, and virtual gatherings.





## Heart & Soul Communities Experience a Range of Social and Economic Benefits

Here are just a few of the many ways communities are revitalized by Community Heart & Soul.

### Pride and confidence grow in the town

From the start, The Heart & Soul Team in McComb, Ohio, (pop. 1,600) was on the move, reaching out to as many residents as possible, marching in the town's celebrated Cookie Festival parade, connecting with locals at the fire department chicken BBQ, and meeting fans at high school sports games, among other events.

One resident observed a positive impact right away: "You know what I love about Heart & Soul? People feel they can be proud of McComb. I've already seen so much good. And it's just the start." Asking people what they love about McComb got people thinking about their town's assets and possibilities. This rekindled a sense of pride.



*McComb Region Heart & Soul, Ohio*

**Learn more:** [www.communityheartandsoul.org/towns/mccomb-ohio](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org/towns/mccomb-ohio)



*Gardiner Heart & Soul, Maine*

### Volunteerism increases

In Gardiner, Maine, (pop. 5,700) city council meetings were characterized by a few angry residents showing up to yell and complain. Community Heart & Soul got residents reconnected to their local government. Interest in serving on committees grew. More people attended council meetings. The tenor of meetings changed as discourse became more civil. The mayor reported a hundredfold increase in active volunteers.

**Learn more:** [www.communityheartandsoul.org/towns/gardiner-maine](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org/towns/gardiner-maine)



## Town officials gain a deeper understanding of what matters to residents

In Cortez, Colorado, (pop. 9,000) city planners wanted to get more residents involved, especially those missing voices rarely heard. City officials began to think beyond city hall as the only place for public meetings. Using the Community Network Analysis, volunteers and planners went to people in their neighborhoods and sponsored block parties and potluck dinners.



*Cortez Heart & Soul, Colorado*

As plans for the future took shape, they went back to residents to check their work. Community engagement helped planners do their jobs. It also strengthened bonds among neighbors based on a shared love of place and the desire to make it better.

**Learn more:** [www.communityheartandsoul.org/towns/cortez-colorado](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org/towns/cortez-colorado)



*Biddeford Heart & Soul, Maine*

## Investment in the town increases

Biddeford, Maine, (pop. 21,000) was known as “Trash Town” because of the industrial garbage incinerator right downtown. But the facility provided 80 jobs and was the largest taxpayer in a town without a lot of options. Engagement activities during Biddeford’s Community Heart & Soul project made it clear that residents wanted the incinerator gone.

That gave officials the backing they needed to buy the facility and close it. The move triggered major reinvestment with more than 90 new businesses and \$90 million invested in the first seven years after Heart & Soul, including a \$50 million boutique hotel and \$15 million in affordable housing.

**Learn more:** [www.communityheartandsoul.org/towns/biddeford-maine](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org/towns/biddeford-maine)

## Residents honor the importance of history and culture

The Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul Team in Pennsylvania (pop. 19,000) heard from a resident about a long abandoned African-American church built by her grandfather circa 1870. The story rallied the community to protect and preserve the church along with the nearby cemetery, where her grandfather’s gravesite is located along with several Civil War veterans. Now, the site is on the National Register of Historic Places and a door has been opened to dialogue about the African-American history in the community.



*Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul, Pennsylvania*

**Learn more:**  
[www.communityheartandsoul.org/towns/greater-carlisle-pennsylvania](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org/towns/greater-carlisle-pennsylvania)



**See more examples of how towns benefit from Community Heart & Soul:**  
[www.communityheartandsoul.org/community-heart-soul-towns](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org/community-heart-soul-towns)

# How Community Heart & Soul Works



Developed and field-tested in partnership with over 100 small cities and towns across the United States, **Community Heart & Soul is a proven process for engaging residents in shaping the future of their community.** For most communities, completing the four phases of

Community Heart & Soul takes about two years. But completion of the Heart & Soul process is really just the beginning. That's because Community Heart & Soul is an ongoing practice that provides municipal officials with a clear understanding of what matters most to their constituents—all the residents—and forges a partnership that builds on the first thing everyone has in common: they all live here.

## Four Phases of Community Heart & Soul

### Phase 1: Imagine

**Approx. 2-3 months:** In Phase 1, you will gather partners and a diverse team of volunteers. Together, you will use your collective hopes for the future to set goals and build awareness, interest and commitment across the community. This is also an important time to identify who lives, works, and plays in the community and to develop a communications plan to reach them all.



### Community Network Analysis

The Community Network Analysis is a guiding tool throughout Community Heart & Soul. **The Community Network Analysis is about understanding who lives, works, and plays in your community and how best to reach them.** It begins by analyzing

community demographics and tapping local knowledge to brainstorm ways to engage different groups and networks. This is used throughout the process to ensure the work involves everyone.



*Golden Heart & Soul, Colorado*



## Phase 2: Connect

**Approx. 6-8 months:** Activities in Phase 2 focus on reaching a broad, diverse mix of people to identify what matters most to your community. Gathering and sharing personal stories about local experiences is a key engagement strategy in this phase, bringing people together to find common ground. This phase ends in articulating that common ground in Heart & Soul Statements, which guide activities and drive results in Phases 3 and 4.



### Heart & Soul Statements

Here is a sampling of Heart & Soul Statements drawn from towns across the country.

“We treasure a vibrant downtown with **small businesses, festivals, parades, waterfront, and art-related opportunities** that provide economic development and places for people to gather; promoting a rich, welcoming sense of community.”

“We appreciate a local community that **celebrates and accepts all of the differences** among individuals that keep our town vibrant and culturally beautiful.”

“Our city government is **responsive, approachable, good at listening**, welcomes participation and involvement, is fair to all parts of the city and is accountable.”



See more Heart & Soul Statements:  
[www.communityheartandsoul.org/phase-two](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org/phase-two)



## Phase 3: Plan

**Approx. 4-6 months:** In Phase 3, your community's Heart & Soul Statements provide a framework for gathering and prioritizing ideas for action. Again, include as many people as possible as you discuss and make decisions for your community's future. You will also begin to plan for the long-term practice of Community Heart & Soul.

### Action Plans

As Bucksport Heart & Soul in Maine completed Phase 3, team leaders wanted to get the ball rolling on ideas prioritized by the community that ranged from **creating a downtown beautification program, to holding block parties, to developing a farm-to-school program.** The team began by signing on organizations, soliciting support from the library, the chamber of commerce, the local land trust, the garden club, and so on.

Next, they held the Bucksport Heart & Soul Summit and Volunteer Fair. **Sixteen organizations that adopted Heart & Soul action items set up displays about their action ideas and signed up volunteers on the spot.** Among the outcomes: a storybook trail on the waterfront walking path, new benches going up on Main Street, and an increase in the number of volunteers, from 30 to 400, who participated in the town's annual spring cleanup day.

*Bucksport Heart & Soul, Maine*



**Hear from the Bucksport Town Manager:**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJQ8Ue\\_oqUg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJQ8Ue_oqUg)





## Phase 4: Act

**Ongoing, starting after Phase 3:** In Phase 4, you will begin the ongoing practice of Heart & Soul, focusing on the transition to sustained long-term implementation. Your town makes policy decisions, and people and organizations work together to implement town's Action Plan and uphold your Heart & Soul Statements.

### Ongoing Practice of Community Heart & Soul

The Madison County, Iowa Heart & Soul team developed an inspirational video highlighting the work of Community Heart & Soul. The video serves as an **inspirational springboard and is supporting decision-makers in using Heart & Soul data to take action.** Heart & Soul Statements have been integrated into the Covered Bridges Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan. The Madison County Heart & Soul website has tools for action planning with specific examples of actions that are utilizing Heart & Soul Statements.



Watch the Madison County video:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=xax68CQwfeI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xax68CQwfeI)

# Resources Needed To Join Community Heart & Soul

Over many years we have invested heavily in developing Community Heart & Soul, tested and deployed it in over 100 communities, learned from what worked and what didn't, tracked the long-term successes and positive impacts, trained coaches and staff of our partners, developed networks among Heart & Soul towns, and now we are ready to expand across the country with your help.

If we were a private consulting business we would be out selling our content and services for lots of money. But we're not. We are a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization that I have funded from my family's business, The Vermont Country Store. We give away our intellectual property. We pay a staff to develop that. We have created a highly valuable practice for small cities and towns to operate and function through resident

## Resources Provided by Community Heart & Soul





“This is the best investment we ever made in our community.”



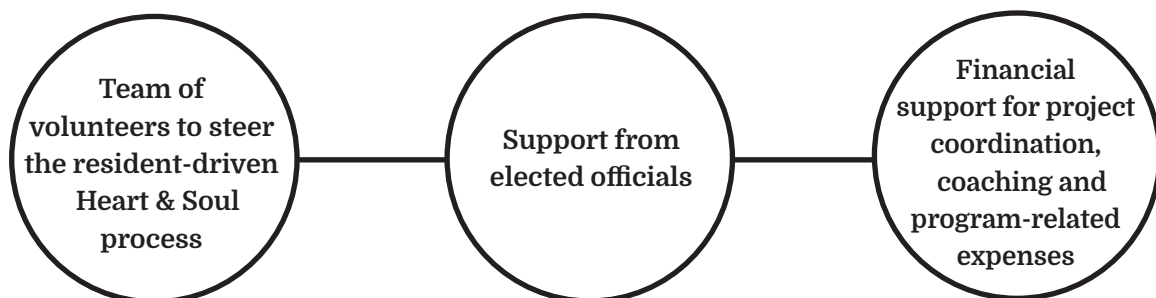
engagement. The feedback we get from practicing towns is “this is the best investment we ever made in our community.”

It’s not totally free. Your town will need to invest. You will need to put skin in the game. That is a powerful incentive to continue the long-term practice of Community Heart & Soul in your town and with that the rewards will emerge.

I invite you to join the expanding network of Heart & Soul towns and all it has to offer your town.

*Lyman Orton*

## Resources Provided by Towns



# Get Started Now!

Community Heart & Soul is about rolling up your sleeves, getting active, and doing things. **With that in mind, here are 4 things you can do to get going right away.**



**Apply for a \$10,000 Community Heart & Soul Seed Grant!** For a limited time, we are offering Seed Grants to help communities with startup funding for Community Heart & Soul. **Complete details are available at:**  
[www.communityheartandsoul.org/seed-grants](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org/seed-grants)

**Watch inspiring videos and read town profiles:**  
[www.communityheartandsoul.org](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org)



**Download our “Community Heart & Soul Overview”:**  
<https://bit.ly/chs-overview>



Email us at [info@communityheartandsoul.org](mailto:info@communityheartandsoul.org) or call us at 802.495.0864. We'll be happy to help you with next steps. There's no better time to start than NOW. Let us know how we can help!

[www.communityheartandsoul.org](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org)

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