



Promoting Comprehensive Community Development in Rural Indiana:

Indiana Stellar Communities Program Research Case Studies

Mid-Year Summary Update

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About Sagamore Institute

Sagamore Institute for Policy Research (SIPR) is an Indianapolis-based nonprofit, nonpartisan, public policy research organization--or think tank. We borrow our name from the Algonquin word *sagamore*, which refers to a trusted individual within the tribe to whom the chief would look for wisdom and advice on issues of public concern. It is thus our mission to research, analyze, and respond to difficult issues, to serve as a meeting place for disparate groups, and to offer wise counsel for a world in progress.

We were born in the spring of 2004, but have roots stretching back two decades, allowing us to blend the energy of a startup with the experience of a more seasoned organization. Our expert network of fellows provides independent and innovative research and analysis to public and private sector leaders, policy makers, practitioners, and the public. We believe that public policy belongs to everyone--not just to those inside the beltway of Washington, D.C.

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Introduction

Comprehensive community development leverages the development process to make positive economic, physical, and psychological impacts that specifically address the specific challenges in distressed neighborhoods, such as low civic capacity, poverty, low governing capacity, large immigrant populations, and an abundance of vacant properties (Beam 2009; Cate 2012; ICCD, 2012). It has its roots in Asset-Based Community Development. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a philosophy championed by community development scholars Jody Kretzman and John McKnight (1993).

Kretzman and McKnight's research indicated that every community has innumerable assets in its people, social networks, institutional actors, physical assets, and modes of exchange that should be the foundational basis for any community reinvestment effort (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993; IACED, 2012). Holistic approaches integrate place- and people-based strategies. Its aim is transformative neighborhood change and work through creative partnerships to drive results and improve neighborhoods.

Over the last several decades, a new generation of "comprehensive community initiatives" has attempted to provide opportunities for economic revitalization in rural communities. By providing unified state resources to stimulate local economic activity and promote sustainability, the state of Indiana has moved toward implementing a collaborative and comprehensive approach to combatting issues related to rural decline as part of its Indiana Stellar Communities Program (ISCP). Launched in 2010, the Indiana Stellar Communities Program (ISCP) is a multi-year, over \$58 million (investments to date) initiative operated by the Indiana Lieutenant Governor's office and funded by three state agencies: the Indiana Housing and Community Economic Development Authority, the Indiana Office of Community

and Rural Affairs, and the Indiana Department of Transportation. The ISCP develops strategic community investment plans, promotes partnerships, and implements comprehensive solutions to address local challenges in Indiana's smaller communities involving community economic development, housing, transportation, and overall quality of life.

Through cross-collaboration of state-funded programs in rural development, housing, and transportation, the ISCP objective is to enable communities to aggressively make local and regional impacts throughout rural Indiana. The program pools funding sources from all three agencies, including the State Revolving Fund, to assist designated communities in achieving long-term comprehensive strategic goals for targeted areas.

ISCP's approach to comprehensive community development is unique by its attempt to improve rural communities in a way that is 1) rooted in emphasizing partnerships and collaboration among multiple public agencies and community partners and 2) focused on combining state resources to make wide-ranging quality-of-life impacts as opposed to separate, piecemeal, incremental improvements.

This is the update research report on the progress, issues, and impacts of the ISCP. It focuses specifically on describing program goals, planning, and implementing those goals in the communities designated as "Stellar" as well as those awarded as finalists between 2011 and 2013. In doing so, it briefly highlights programmatic process, implementation, and findings (e.g., successes, challenges, and lessons learned) to date, while providing an assessment of current economic and social impacts of the program. Future reports will continue this assessment.

Research Methodology

A multi-method case study approach was used to examine each of these partnership projects in depth and to conduct a cross-site analysis that would identify key themes, challenges, success factors, and lessons learned across the sites and between agencies. The case studies described and analyzed in these pages both provide impressive evidence of the potential of CCD to help promote change on the policy or systems level, and capture the range and diversity of the cases examined.

Data was obtained from three primary sources:

1) key informant and social network interviews with civic and community leaders, residents, private stakeholders, consultants, and local government officials, 2) field observations of community-based events, steering committee meetings, and project sites, and 3) archival data, among others.

During a 16-month period, 86 face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with ISCP participants in Bedford, Delphi, Greencastle, North Vernon, Princeton, Richmond, staff from IHCD, OCRA, and INDOT, as well as stakeholders from the 20 finalist communities.

Study Agenda and Scope

In partnership with the Indiana Lieutenant Governor's Office, the Indiana Housing Community Development Authority, the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, and the Indiana Department of Transportation, Sagamore Institute for Policy Research is building a body of knowledge about implementation, achievements, and challenges of the Indiana Stellar Communities Program (ISCP) approach to comprehensive community development in Indiana's rural communities. Towards this effort, the research is documenting:

1. **The implementation of ISCP over time.** The research is examining:
 - Ways in which the ISCP model is imple-

mented in varying community context and funding rounds.

- What challenges emerged and how they were addressed.
 - The extent to which social capital affected each community and state organization's capacities to build and sustain partnerships and leverage other forms of community capital and investments.
2. **The local and regional reach of ISCP accomplishments.** The research is investigating areas of impacts, particularly at the local and regional levels. It attempts to describe the location of projects and investments within ISCP designated cities, how ISCP investments impact and co-relate with other major public and private investments that impact community revitalization and quality of life standards. The goal of this inquiry is to understand and explore how these spatially targeted local investments correlate with neighborhood conditions and quality of life improvements, foster regional investments, and encourage sustainability and capacity building.
 3. **The implications of local and regional alliances and partnerships.** The research is analyzing the critical importance of strong relationships and alliances with individuals, agencies, and organizations that have influence over community outcomes.
 4. **Patterns of community change.** The research is tracking how different ISCP designated communities fared in the implementation phases, including identifying evidence of tangible and intangible improvements. It examines and compares comprehensive community development strategies and outcomes of neighborhood investments and conditions among the ISCP designated cities sequenced over time.

Preliminary Findings

Success factors across State Agency Partners

Many factors contributing to the success of state agency partners were context-specific to a state agency's role and functions. The following successes emerged in the analysis of the application, planning, and implementation of the program across state agencies. According to state agency participants, major successes of the ISCP process are it:

- **Creates an opportunity for change:** State agency respondents noted that participating in the process allows agencies to invest in change in small rural communities.
- **Establishes community trust:** State agency respondents described an increase in trust between local officials and their agencies, due to having good communication with city officials and stakeholders and following up. In interviews, respondents said the following:

"Our regional staff is the face of the program. They are willing to travel. To go out in the field and talk with communities."

"The program allowed us to build good communication and trust through follow-up."

- **Provides greater flexibility than traditional funding programs:** The ISCP process allows state agencies to develop a broader scope of community development by utilizing traditional funding in a different manner, whereby taking the agencies outside of their comfort zones. One respondent explains:

"Prior to Stellar, IHCDa mainly used funding for affordable housing. [With ISCP] we were able to fund a bookstore, parking solutions, etc. These are some things IHCDa had never done before."

- **Builds and maintains strong relationships and brings resources together:** ISCP participants indicated that the process strengthened the relationship between the state agencies and with community partners. Participants

also noted that the process allowed agencies and community partners to bring resources together to move projects forward. Respondents describe how the process improved relationships:

"Overall, we definitely have much more of a relationship with those agencies than we did in the past...maintaining strong relationships with OCRA and INDOT is vital."

"[The ISCP process is] a great example of tearing down silos, working with other state agencies, and building relationships within state frameworks."

"Develops relationships [within the communities and between local and state officials] in building capacity and knowledge to move plans forward."

- **Creates a new replicable model for comprehensive development:** Being an experiential type of program, the ISCP creates a replicable base model from which current and future community development programs can adopt, such as IHCDa's Communities for a Lifetime or OCRA's Place-based Investment Fund and Community Entrepreneurship Initiative program with the Office of Small Business Enterprise. Respondents report cases of how the model has been replicated:

"...In creating new initiatives, Stellar is a good model for other programs such as [IHCDa's new program] Communities for a Lifetime."

"We use it [ISCP] as a model for our Place-based Investment Fund and Community Entrepreneurship Initiative with OSBE [Office of Small Business Enterprise]."

- **Improves education and program expectations:** State agency partners noted that they have learned from their previous mistakes with communication with community partners and have since done a better job of educating and

managing expectations of communities that we are working with.

Challenges faced by State Agency Partners

Each partner faced challenges predicated in the organization's mission, policies, funding priorities, the historical relationships, and functional realities surrounding the implementation of a new program. These challenges ranged from miscommunication of program expectations (e.g., the program being a grant award) to problems posed by high staff turnover and funding limitations (e.g., federal guidelines slowing down the process). The partners encountered several common challenges:

- **Limitations of funding sources:** Over time, the amount of funding available diminished in size. Additionally, types of funding sources available for program implementation changed. The funding resources also had parameters on how the funding could be used. Respondents report cases of how limited funding posed challenges:

"The biggest challenge is the funding sources, with federal funding getting cut. It's harder to set aside the same amount as we have done in the past. We need to seek other agencies."

"Some projects were not fundable under the funding parameters or guidelines."

- **Lack of full transparency and clear message:** Respondents identified a lack of transparency in the process regarding the selection of communities designated. The perceptions of poor transparency resulted in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity among community participants. Respondent offer descriptions of the challenge of transparency among stakeholders and community partners:

"There is not as much transparency on the Stellar process as there is in everything else IHCDa touches. With most of our program funding, there is an application which is very

black- and-white. You get a point for this, you get a point for that. The nature of the program [ISCP] is not so black-and-white, and leaves room for different interpretations for discussion. It's a moving target with uncertainty."

"An inability to articulate with communities that were not designated was a limitation."

"We need a clear message and we need to do a better job of explaining the process."

"We need to do a better job of communication of what we are expecting, what our feedback is, working with communities and following up."

- **Clarification of expectations upfront and advertising of program:** Throughout the program administration there appeared a lack of clear communication of state expectations of the local community partners. Respondents indicated that there were miscommunications to potential community participants about how the program works. There were also misconceptions of the availability of programmatic funding for projects and funding requirements. Some applicants' perceptions of the program, particularly early on, were that they had unlimited access to a large amount for funding. In some instances, participants were not aware that designation did not guarantee funding. Respondents elaborate on the challenge of communicating expectations clearly and effectively:

"Communities are very surprised that funding \$1 million project was not free. It would have an interest rate on it. Or it would be repayable loan...that there are strings on some of these programs."

"I think the first couple of years we were so caught up in this mindset of 'You know we are going to try to do anything and everything and say okay don't worry about that dream big.' Communities became frustrated because later we were like 'By the way there are 100 pages of compliance that you need to read to administer this award. Yeah we told you upfront not to worry about those things, but of course you

need to because these are federal funds going into the project.’’

- **Inconsistencies in process and message:** Respondents noted that, in some cases, community administration changed in the middle of the program. In addition, state level or local level administration personnel were also replaced and responsibilities were altered. These turnovers resulted in changes of expectations or goals of the program as illustrated in program implementation challenges faced by both community partners and state agency staff. For instance, there was a lack of standardization in record keeping by program officers. So as new program officers took over, the knowledge was not captured.

Consequently, communities who may have applied for multiple rounds may have received contradicting feedback either on how to improve their applications or why they may not have been chosen as a finalist of designee. A respondent provides an example of implications of inconsistencies in the process:

“Because of the turnover [in state agencies] there were a different group of individuals evaluating. It became a moving target ... and therefore it hindered transparency to communities.”

Success factors across Community Partners

This analysis included data provided by finalist and ISCP designated community partners. Many factors contributing to the success of these case studies were context-specific and unique to particular communities, projects, and partnerships. At the same time, several factors emerged in our cross-site analysis. These include:

- **Presence of strong community partner organizations:** Respondents identified the presence of strong community partner organizations prior to the application process assisted in the development of strong community investment plans. Interview respondents describe this in more detail:

“They [partnership relationships] were already there. It is important for those groups to work together in any community. Stellar gave us a mechanism to rally the troops “so to speak” and to bring them around the table to complete for a very large grant in the state of Indiana. But those relationships were there. We wouldn’t have been able to pull off the plans that we did, the site visit we did, and the process we did if those relationships hadn’t have been there.”

“It put us on the map a little more. Consultants and developers started approaching us. For example, over the past five years we have not had one new residential area started. Now we have two that have started and one that is just finishing. We have five new residential areas by the end of the year, simply because they’ve heard of Stellar. It really does make you more of a progressive community.”

- **High level of mutual respect and trust:** Respondents noted a high level of mutual respect and trust among the community partners and stakeholders, and an appreciation of the complementary skills and resources that each partner brought.

- **Commitment to building strong collaborations and alliances:** Respondents demonstrated the commitment to building strong collaborations and alliances with diverse stakeholders beyond the formal city and county governments as a vital component of success. For example,

All respondents identified the ISCP community investment planning (CIP) process as a mechanism by which partnerships were strengthened to leverage opportunities, obtain other investments, and increase community capacity to complete projects. Respondents explain how the partnerships were strengthened:

“I think the partnerships were strengthened because sometimes people in smaller communities that look at what the administration is trying to do and think that it’s just the administration trying to pull these things off....But with something



Photos (Left to Right): Rom-Weber Building and Pearl Street one-way to two-way reconfiguration and streetscape improvements (Top to Bottom): Before and after pictures/renderings. Source: City of Batesville, Indiana Office of the Mayor, 2014.

like Stellar, the Governor, and Lt. Governor behind it...gives it more legitimacy. And our people really wanted to become involved and showcase our community.”

“It opened doors for us. People who come into the community, it’s one of the things they bring up. So it’s been a very positive thing. Plus, meeting people through the state, that was also a positive aspect of it.”

“I think the product we got out of being a finalist, the CIP, has been helpful to us and has resulted in other grant awards we have received... We were able to get a nice federal highway grant...I think that all the work we did leading up to that is what really helped us to become successful. We put a lot of effort into the planning and prioritizing. I think it had a lot to do with that.”

- **Appreciation and need for community engagement and comprehensive planning:** Respondents identified an appreciation by all part-

ners of the need community engagement and strategic, comprehensive planning for putting the program into action.

- **Commitment to “doing your homework”:** Respondents indicated a crucial component of the application process is conducting research on the process and program requirements beforehand. Finding out what other communities have done, who holds decision-making authority within the state agencies, and key leverage points.

- **Allowed plans to become realities:** The process allowed for community investment plans to become realities by fostering regional and transformative investments for both ISCP finalists and designees.

For example,

In Angola, city leaders and community partners acquired grants to complete downtown

improvements such as the Civil War Monument repairs, new upgraded street lighting, infrastructure and streetscape improvements. The city has also been successful in acquiring a vacant commercial property for adaptive reuse as a trailhead for a bike trail project. To date, public and private investments are estimated at \$2.5 million.

In Batesville, city stakeholders have been able to complete over \$10 million in local investments. The city implemented six projects outlined in its initial community investment plan. These projects include: Main Street facades, street infrastructure improvements, as well as, park greenspace and streetscape improvements.

In Bedford, revitalization activities proposed in prior ISCP applications have been completed or are in progress. These include, but are not limited to, Harp Commons renewal of park and festival space, courthouse renovations, decorative sidewalk railings, storm water improvements, Milwaukee Depot tile roof replacement, the Historic Stalker School adaptive reuse into Stalker School Apartments, and a downtown Wi-Fi Bubble (creating free internet access for downtown offices, shops, and residents), as well as the residential housing rehabilitation of approximately 30 homes.

In Delphi, the Stellar Planning team moved forward with Phase One construction of the Washington Street Gateway Trail. This project will create a new gateway connecting Hoosier Heartland Corridor to downtown Delphi, the Canal Center, downtown neighborhoods, and numerous other trails. The project also includes improvements at the North Street viaduct to serve as a gateway to the downtown area. In addition, Delphi's Stellar Planning team have begun implementation of a downtown facade improvement program, with 37 property owners committed to participating.

In Frankfort, the Ivy Tech development -- a



PHOTOS: L-R. Bicentennial Plaza Construction. Princeton Theater and Community Center Construction. April 30, 2014. Source: HWC Engineering.

complimentary ISCP project -- is complete. On another occasion, the city's team and civic leaders completed a street improvement project and is purchasing property to begin implementation of its facade improvement program, both of which were highlighted by the Frankfort Stellar Team's ISCP application and community improvement plan.

In Greencastle, the Stellar Team implemented the first phase of downtown facade improvements and is moving towards the planning of the second phase. In all, approximately 11 businesses participated in the initial round of the facade program. Additionally, Greencastle's Stellar Team is in the process of completing, the Indiana Street improvements and downtown parking improvements construction is to begin in the fall of 2014. The city



PHOTO: Citizens using the Downtown Richmond Wi-Fi connection. Source: City of Richmond, Indiana Newsletter, June 2014.

also finalized Phase One of its owner-occupied housing improvements and is looking forward to carrying out the second phase.

In Marion, the Vectren Corporation assembled a strategic partnership with the City, including representatives from City Hall, businesses, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions and faith-based communities, to develop a unified, collaborative approach for revitalizing economically-challenged neighborhoods. The city's community revitalization partnership known as the Magnificent Seven, led to the demolition of approximately 15 blighted and vacant units and the renovation of 100 owner-occupied housing units. In addition, civic leaders have acquired all of the riverfront property necessary for downtown park renovation. All of these projects were identified in Marion's 2012 ISCP Community Investment Plan.

In North Vernon, the Carnegie Library is complete as well as the Short Street Plaza. The North Vernon Stellar Team also finalized Phase One of its owner-occupied housing and streetscape improvements in its Irish Hill Neighborhood along with property acquisition for the city's multi-use trail, which will connect North Vernon to Muscatatuck County Park.

In Princeton, construction of the Prince Street Senior Housing project, downtown facades,

Bicentennial Plaza, and the Princeton Theater and Community Center are underway. The housing development will have four one-bedroom apartments and 32 two-bedroom apartments. The senior housing investment is an estimated \$6.3 million worth of investments. In addition, downtown facades improvements and the theater renovations are an estimated \$6.7 million in investments.

In Richmond, the Center City Development Corporation and Stellar Communities Implementation Team introduced free public Wi-Fi to the residents of Richmond in an effort to attract and retain downtown living, businesses and visitors. This project was funded by the Richmond Redevelopment Commission with Certified Technology Park funds to: 1) increase the amount of time people spend in the downtown area and 2) increase the quality of life for residents who spend an ample amount of their time within the area.

In Shelbyville, civic leaders and stakeholders estimated an average of \$12 million in both public and private investments. In the city the downtown facade program has been expanded, the city's Blue River Memorial Trail project is underway, 14 units of owner-occupied housing renovations were completed, as well as the adaptive reuse of a vacant school building.

Challenges faced by Community Partners

Each community faced challenges grounded in the historical, socio-demographic, economic, and political context surrounding the application and implementation processes of the ISCP program. These challenges ranged from the perceptions of lack of clear understanding of programmatic needs and requirements, to problems posed by funding constraints or prohibitions altering or scrapping proposed projects. Based on the case studies discussed in this report, the community partners encountered several common challenges

in both the application process and program implementation:

Application Process

- **Vagueness during application process and lack of feedback.** Respondents expressed a need for clarity and consistency in program expectations during the application process and in the feedback process afterwards. In addition, there was an overall perception among community partners of a lack of sufficient understanding of the program processes, expectations, and avenues for implementation and funding sources. Respondents report cases of how vagueness in the process posed challenges:

“They say don’t tailor your application to the agency’s programs, but then the application called out those programs. It’s really a grey area. They say they want to see one thing, going in they ask for something different. They need to hone in on what they want to see or be more specific on projects they don’t want to consider as part of Stellar. For instance, do certain projects need to remain complimentary? You don’t want to put a lot of time and money in projects that they are going to throw out in a cursory review.”

“Be clear about exactly what needs to be included... projects and private partnerships. What are certain things that need to be there to be successful? So as not to waste city administrations staff, time, and dollars.”

- **Need for standardized metrics.** Respondents specified the lack of a standardized metrics for which communities are to be graded as challenging.

“There was an inability to articulate why communities weren’t selected.”

“Communities have to have a set a metrics by which it will be graded, so that after the phase out process and during the final interviews when you are told that you are not a Stellar Community you know exactly why that was and how you were graded against other communities; and how the final decision was made by those metrics. I think that communities will then have an idea in future Stellar Community cycles what they need to improve upon exactly. Was it the transportation effort of the plan? Was it the housing component

of the plan? Was where you were looking at putting housing? Was that detrimental of your overall score?”

“When you participate in the program, you really don’t what you are doing. There is no training and it’s not like other programs where there is scoring. Where if you do this you get points and if you do that you get points. And I don’t know if you can really do this with this type of program.”

- **Absence of resources.** Respondents acknowledged the lack of resources as a potential barrier in the application and implementation process. For example, respondents in smaller jurisdictions identified the lack of staff capacity (i.e., human capital) and/or private partnerships (i.e., social and financial capital) as a hindrance in moving their application forward. A few respondents describe this deficiency:

“It seems to be, the more they do this, the more it’s geared towards larger cities.”

“It is a lot of time for small cities with small staff...It can be difficult to juggle normal responsibilities along with Stellar.”

- **Conflict between consultant-driven versus community-driven application.** Respondents noted a perception that hiring a consultant was a necessity for applicants to be successful. One respondent notes:

“Everyone thinks you need to hire a consultant or hire the right consultant. As a community that has the resources, it would be nice to hear that you can do it yourself and if they want to see it come from you and not outside vision, because this can cause internal strife. We have two different camps and we have to fight to keep it in-house vs hire a consultant.”

Program Implementation

- **Funding constraints or termination.** Respondents identified funding constraints and/or termination of funding or changes in sources of project support, which in turn delayed or changed the scope of projects or project timelines.
- **Difficulty measuring the short-term and**

longer-term impacts of program. Respondents conveyed a need for standardization in measuring impacts. Each community uses their own mechanism to document and measure investments related to the ISCP.

What Works

Both state agency and community partners identified several lessons learned and/or best practices which they deemed important factors to consider when undertaking an initiative of this scale.

State Agency Partners

- Maintain good communication and trust throughout the entire process - This should be in the front-end of the process as well as during follow-up so that community partners will value the process.
- Be flexible with funding sources and be willing to think beyond your comfort zone – Develop a broader scope of how to use funding for project implementation.
- Standardize and document the process (i.e., evaluation, inquiries, resolutions, and feedback) among and between state agencies. Transparency is necessary for the continued success of the program.
- Combining different federal funding programs and a common ground on missions can be difficult to accomplish.

Community Partners

- Public participation helps with public buy-in, particularly from those individuals who control purse strings, because they have to listen.
- Before engaging in a process of this enormity, be prudent on researching the metrics, time commitments, resources needed, and overall programmatic expectations.
- Focus on and strengthen the most important parts of the community investment plan that make the community’s overall vision work.

- Keep a tight geographic area so that the transformative investments are evident.
- Have patience and get the community involved upfront so it is their plan.

Benefits of the ISCP Approach

State agencies and community partners identified seven common benefits of the shared approach:

- **Attracts of all forms of community capital:** One respondent states, “It enabled us to not just attract outside capital, but to attract outside capital and leverage other capital.”
- **Creates tangible and intangible improvements:** Respondents note, “Stellar leads to other impacts that are not just dollars and cents.” “Allows agencies to invest in change in small rural communities.”
- **Expedites projects:** A respondent explains, “The overall value of Stellar is to help communities move projects in three years that they would not have been able to move in three years. It would’ve been more like 10 to 12 years.”
- **Forces long-term and comprehensive planning efforts:** A respondent states, “The value of Stellar is that it does force you to look at long-term planning. It forces you to bond together different issues in your community with different organizations into one fluid mission.”
- **Enables the cultivation of relationships:** A respondent explains, “It [ISCP] does force you to cultivate relationships among leadership organizations in the community to accomplish this goal we simply couldn’t without.”
- **Provides a basis for project implementation and community involvement:** One respondent describes this benefit in more detail. “It [ISCP] did allow us, as well as present us with a menu, to take our plan and put it on paper

and make it more specific. It served as a good base for moving forward and implementing. If we had not done Stellar, those plans would not have been formally presented to the community. And what Stellar did was give us the buy-in of the community...We really got the community fired up and excited.”

Recommendations

Each of the partners included in this study was selected in part because of its perceived role in contributing to or implementation of the ISCP process. Based on their experiences and shared concerns, the following recommendations are offered to state agency partners and ISCP participants that would enhance both effectiveness and transparency. To date, the three most critical of these recommended changes are:

- **Develop a clear, transparent, and consistent message and program.** Consider altering the application and administration processes to be as simple and as concise as possible – avoid bureaucratic overload while maintaining sufficient rigor in the process (develop application and reporting frameworks that can be monitored and tracked). In addition, provide expectations and transparency in reporting, evaluation, and monitoring by creating a set of objective metrics by which the communities will be graded upon. This will permit communities the ability to understand how they stack up against program goals during the application phase. This may also assist state agency staff during the exit interview and follow-up afterwards in the organization(s) rationale(s) behind the selections for finalist and designations.
- **Consider modifying the program to create population-based tiered designations centered on community size and capacity.** Participants identified community size and capacity as a barrier in the competition for designation. Smaller jurisdictions may not have the same resources and community

capital as larger cities and towns. Research the possibility of revising the program to allow for two application or designation cycles based upon community size and or capacity. For example, towns and cities with populations $\leq 5,000$ may be placed in a Tier 1 application and funding group, while towns and cities with populations $\geq 5,000$ in Tier 2. This may allow for more equitable competition among municipalities of various sizes and capacities.

- **Create a standardize method to track program outcomes.** In order to better track performance and outcomes, develop means for full reporting of investments quarterly or annually for public and private investment (city-wide and in stellar designated areas) electronically or on-line which:
 - a) *Clearly articulate how program impacts are measured and validated.* This should include how program impacts on public and private investments are measured as a clear and quantifiable outcomes based on city-wide versus target area investments as well as private versus public investments. Program managers should also report on the time period needed to realize an outcome and to what extent metrics are standardized to allow for year-over-year and/or quarterly comparisons.
 - b) *Allows community partners to illustrate the extent:*
 1. Of their collaboration with other state, federal, private, and non-profit organizations.
 2. How closely did implementation match the plan? What types of changes were made to the originally proposed plan? What led to the changes in the original plan?
 3. Who provided (program staff/lead organization) what services (type, intensity, duration), to whom (target population served), in what context (community/need), and at what cost (facilities, personnel, indirect/direct)?

Conclusion & Next steps

The shared approach for comprehensive neighborhood revitalization in rural Indiana communities is fostering broad-based, cross-sector partnerships and is coordinating public and private funding and resources.

The ISCP approach has been fueled by a significant investment and alignment of resources by OCRA, IHCD, INDOT, and community partners. The momentum gained by these initial investments is priming the field for sustained investment and collaborative programming, which will produce stronger, healthier, and more vibrant people and rural communities.

This summary report represents the culmination of the second year of Sagamore Institute’s contracted research and evaluation of the Indiana Stellar Communities Program. The goal has been to gather information about the Indiana Stellar Communities Program from state agencies, community partners, and stakeholders, so that the evaluation process and implementation within ISCP can be strengthened.

In the second phase of this evaluation, to be in winter of 2014, Sagamore Institute will continue the analysis of the six Stellar communities (Greencastle and North Vernon (2011); Delphi and Princeton (2012); and Bedford and Richmond (2013)).

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