

new measure- ments for NewCities

BY DR. STEPHEN LANGE & DR. DAVID RUDY

“We would like your help in developing a scorecard for the NewCities Morehead project,” the friendly caller said.

Many professors receiving such a call might have asked: “What is a NewCity? And aren’t scorecards used for sports?”

Fortunately, we at the Institute for Regional Analysis and Public Policy (IRAPP) at Morehead State University were familiar with the NewCities Institute’s recent work in Morehead. But this also meant that we were immediately aware of some of the hurdles fulfilling this request represented.

The NewCities Institute is undertaking a daring, exciting and potentially community-changing initiative—indeed, that is its very purpose. As its Web site points out, the initiative is “an intensive effort between the NewCities Institute and a community to engage the community’s citizens to build a roadmap for the future. ... [It] is about process and substantive change that ensures the long-term vitality of a community. ... [It seeks] to unleash the citizens’ power for creating social and economic wealth under the new rules of the 21st century global economy.”

We knew that Morehead and Rowan County had already done admirable work on the project. The energy, optimism, commitment and long-term vision from more than 200 participants were readily apparent in the final report issued in September 2006. There was a lot of excitement in the air. Morehead had been the first Kentucky community selected for the initiative, and we were being asked to help come up with an assessment tool that would help measure its effectiveness.

Talk about feeling the pressure. It is not that we were daunted by the applied research aspect of



Morehead State students visited the Appalachian Regional Commission to present their findings on the NewCities program.

result would then be a score of the degree to which a community had become a NewCity – that is, the degree to which the community had embodied the 12 Principles of the NewCities Institute.

Our team understood the 12 Principles of the NewCities Institute and recognized their importance in helping to measure success. In our discussions, however, we also became aware that we needed to be careful about using those guides too narrowly in a standardized approach by which all future cities would be measured. If we were too restrictive and rigid, we would in effect be undermining some of the very principles that the Institute is seeking to implement.

In particular, if communities are to remain true to their heritage and capitalize on their uniqueness, and if the NewCities process is to engage citizens in shaping their own vision of the future, then the direction that each community takes will not adhere to a single standard. How, then, could a scorecard be developed to measure progress in communities that are moving in significantly different directions?

this request; those of us at IRAPP often undertake such work. But we were concerned about what kind of measure would be best for this unique initiative—prompting discussions with other faculty about a tool that would work in Morehead that also could be used to assess future

initiatives in other cities.

One possibility included a rating system that would enable cities to compare themselves to one another on a number of dimensions, such as economic development, demographic diversity and educational opportunities and attainment. The

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The Morehead State team also visited the office of U.S. Rep. Harold Rogers, R-KY.

Sylvia Lovely, the Kentucky League of Cities executive director/CEO, points out in *The Little Blue Book of Big Ideas* that there are some objectives that communities share as they work to become places

where people not only live but also thrive. Economic prosperity, for example, is one of the objectives that can be advanced in numerous ways—enhanced educational opportunities, improved infrastructure for business

opportunities, participating in the global economy via the Internet and others. All of this could be measured through standard indicators obtained from census data. In addition, the positive effects of a diverse population can be measured through demographic data, also available in the census, pertaining to ethnic diversity and

All of this means that the progress report does not lend itself to comparisons between communities. But the purpose of NewCities is not to make one city better than another but to make each city the best it can be.

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the proportion of youth and young families.

But this approach presents at least two problems. First, economic census data is available only once every seven years and the general census is, of course, only undertaken once every 10 years. How could we measure progress sooner than that without conducting a prohibitively expensive census-like survey of the entire community every year or two?

Second, how could we be sure that improvements or declines in areas such as economic prosperity or demographic diversity, are the result of community efforts initiated by the

NewCities process and not simply regional, national or global trends or changes?

To provide a more timely assessment, allow flexibility for the unique directions that different communities might undertake, and also ensure the direct measuring of outcomes for which the initiative is responsible, IRAPP developed the NewCities Progress Report. This is a survey that measures more qualitative, contextual indicators in the local community and that can be performed every year or two as each local NewCity committee continues its work.

The progress report is composed of nine sections pertaining to different aspects of the 12 NewCities Principles:

- ☒ Civic and political opportunities and participation
- ☒ Cultural opportunities and participation
- ☒ Leadership
- ☒ Education
- ☒ Youth
- ☒ Uniqueness
- ☒ Environmental
- ☒ Health
- ☒ Community participation

Each of these nine sections has three parts: a checklist, quantitative measures and an explanatory narrative. The collection of this information is coordinated by the NewCity local initiative committee, taking advantage of the knowledge of informed local community leaders for each section.

The checklist is an overview of the existing community activities in each of the nine areas and asks explicitly whether the local NewCity committee is undertaking or planning to undertake any relevant projects, thereby establishing whether there is a causal relationship between the work of NewCities and changes

in the community.

Part two measures these resources in greater detail. For instance, the public library can list the programs it has for the community, the total attendance, and the demographics of people who take advantage of those programs. Flexibility is a key element. Instead of gathering all of the data for every available cultural opportunity, the local committee can select a representative subset to establish a baseline. By collecting similar data in subsequent years, the progress report will establish what change has resulted from the NewCities initiative.

The third section is an explanatory narrative which allows the community to describe its unique aspects in greater detail and provide information that may not otherwise be requested in the progress report. This might include unique events or partnerships among museums, galleries and educational institutions. The explanatory narrative is designed to capture this qualitative information to create a more nuanced picture of the community.

As a whole, the progress report captures an array of community attributes that are relevant to the work of NewCities and provides for an assessment of the impact of the work over time. This measurement also can be done without undermining each community's uniqueness or creativity.

All of this means that the progress report does not lend itself to comparisons among communities. But the purpose of NewCities is not to make one city better than another but to make each city the best it can be.

Finally, information from the indicators to be monitored in the progress report complements the census data. Using both will give communities a timely, clear and comprehensive picture of their progress.

The NewCity Morehead initiative also offered IRAPP students an opportunity to combine theory,

Morehead State University students who participated in the NewCities work were:

Michael Anteau, Susan Brown, Aaron Dourson, Travers Cody Hawkins, Joshua Hicks, Seth Jenkins, Ainsley Lambert, Joseph Means, Tara Nanny, James Channing Richardson, Nicholas Rose, Thomas Stevens, Christopher Westendorf and Grant York

NewCities Institute 12 Principles of Community Building

Feed the Mind, Nurture the Soul

Connect to the World

Buy Locally, Sell Globally

Remain True to the City's Uniqueness

Don't Merely Grow, Plan and Develop Over Time

Build Beautifully and Steward the Environment

Cultivate Leadership and Citizen Involvement

Encourage Youth, Diversity, and Inclusiveness

Embrace Healthy Living

Recruit, Retain, and Generate Wealth

Mimic Bigness, but Think Small

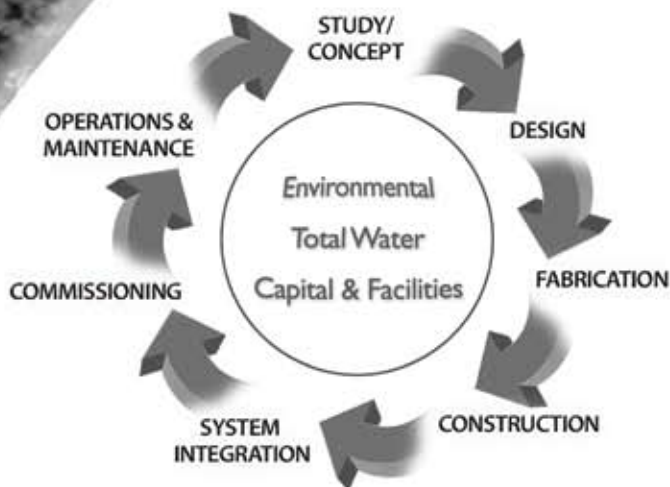
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research and real-world situations.

Dr. Lange's junior seminar class (supported by the Appalachian Teaching Project funded through the Appalachian Regional Commission), collected and analyzed literature on community development, community organization, and civic engagement to assess the overall approach of the

The students' study of the Appalachian region led them to believe that the NewCities approach is especially well-suited to the region's small and medium-sized communities.

NewCities Institute.

They concluded that the NewCities Institute and the process it advocates are in harmony with much of the findings in social science research, and thus, it is reasonable to expect that in principle the Institute will be successful in its attempts to reinvigorate community life and civic engagement in America's cities.

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The class also conducted a pilot test of the progress report in Morehead, compiling the raw data and performing a preliminary analysis. Although few definitive conclusions can be drawn until a second set of data is collected, the students concluded that Morehead is moving in the right direction toward becoming a NewCity.


The students subsequently made

several presentations of their findings to:

- officials of the Appalachian Regional Commission in Washington, D.C.
- faculty and students from 13 other colleges and universities at the Appalachian Teaching Project
- faculty and students at Morehead State University
- the NewCity Morehead local initiative committee
- legislators at the state Capitol

Meanwhile, the work of the NewCities Institute continues. Madisonville, the second Kentucky NewCity, has just completed the visioning process and received Institute recommendations. That community is adapting the progress report to fit its needs for evaluation.

And the American Democracy Project's annual meeting this year includes a report about the partnership between NewCities and IRAPP at Morehead State University and the example it provides of how community development, civic engagement and service learning can be combined in innovative and effective ways.

Sometimes everything falls into place—community development, applied research and service learning. There are many such partnership opportunities out there. Sometimes you just need to look at things in NewWays. 



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