

## Evaluating an asset-based effort to attract and retain young people

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The loss of young people is a common issue facing many small towns and rural areas across the United States. Numerous community development strategies have been implemented to attract and retain these young people to help sustain local communities and economies. This paper discusses one such strategy and explores the evaluation methodology used to measure its effectiveness. An asset-based community development initiative aimed at attracting and retaining young people was introduced in northern Wisconsin and the western edge of Michigan's Upper Peninsula in 2008. A survey of the community's young people led to the creation of an asset map for the range. Community residents worked to strengthen, promote, and connect its young people to these mapped assets. A 10-year evaluation plan was created to measure the effectiveness of this community-based initiative. A variety of qualitative and quantitative measurement tools were used to evaluate the resulting short-term changes in learning and mid-term changes in action. The evaluation process identified both programming strengths and weaknesses that could be valuable for other community development professionals working to attract and retain young people in their own rural small towns or communities.

**Keywords:** community development; economic development; attracting and retaining young people; evaluation; asset-based community development

### Introduction

The movement of young people away from rural America is not new. Population movements in the United States have been marked by the growth of urban areas at the expense of people moving away from rural areas for decades (Lichter & Brown, 2011). Young, educated people represent the highest rates of out-migration from rural areas (Domina, 2006). Roughly 70% of young, single, and college-educated adults living in non-metropolitan areas reported moving between 1995 and 2000, with 75% of them choosing to live in a different county (US Census Bureau, 2003). The brain drain is especially severe in rural communities with traditional agricultural and manufacturing economies (Goudy, 2002). Chronic employment losses, declining tax bases, and high levels of poverty are only a few factors that lead to places that Cornelia and Jan Flora label "persistent poverty communities" where "Those who can leave do. Those who can't leave simply make do" (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 21).

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Three broad categories of strategies exist to attract and retain youth in rural areas and small towns (Winchester, 2010). First are "on the map" strategies that promote the community through electronic media or other creative approaches such as matching potential workers to vacancies in the community or coordinating with local realtors to track prospective new residents. Second are employment-related strategies such as recruiting telecommuters from larger cities or through business succession planning. Third are support strategies to connect new residents with the social capital of the community through welcome wagons, social networking opportunities, and special events.

Carr and Kefalas (2009) argue that new strategies will be necessary to reduce or reverse the loss of young people in rural communities. "The popular tactic of luring even medium-sized companies to small towns with incentives, tax breaks, and the promise of an eager workforce, a practice often referred to as 'elephant hunting', is ineffective for most small towns. The counterpoint to elephant hunting is often called 'economic gardening' and the focus is on planting multiple seeds for local growth in the hope that some will bear fruit" (Carr and Kefalas, 2009, p. 155).

For example, researchers in the western panhandle of Nebraska demonstrate overall population losses in the region, but gains in the 30–44 years old cohort (Burkhart-Kriesel, Cantrell, Johnson, Narjes, & Vogt, 2007). Rather than viewing rural America entirely through the lens of a brain drain, the researchers believe that the growth in educated, skilled, and slightly older adults is actually a brain gain for their region. They argue that communities and regions should take advantage of the experience, skill sets, and entrepreneurial abilities that these new residents bring with them to sustain and grow their economies.

In the border region of Northern Wisconsin and the western edge of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, community residents worked to attract and retain young people by strengthening, promoting, and connecting its young people to the community's assets. This paper focuses on two important elements related to this community-based effort. First, it explores the evaluation process used to measure the program's effectiveness. Second, it discusses whether or not the effort succeeded in achieving its mission to attract and retain young people. The evaluation methodology and the initiative being measured may benefit community development professionals working to attract and retain youth in rural and small-town communities.

### **Background**

The Gogebic Range of Iron County, Wisconsin and Gogebic County, Michigan (Figure 1) could be classified as a "persistent poverty community". Iron ore was discovered on the Gogebic Range in the late 1800s and the population of the range boomed to a peak of 43,000 people in 1920. When the mines started closing in the 1920s, the population rapidly declined. The population has declined in every decade for the past 90 years. Today, the population of the range is barely over 20,000 people (US Census Bureau, 1900–2010) (Figure 2).

Consequently, the region lost many young people. Both counties are significantly older than their respective states and the nation. According to the American Community Survey's five-year estimates, Iron County had a median age of 48.7 years in 2009 compared with 37.8 years in Wisconsin. Gogebic County's median age was 45.4 years compared with Michigan's in 37.7 years. Only 16.7% of Iron County residents were younger than 18 years compared with 23.6% for Wisconsin. Only

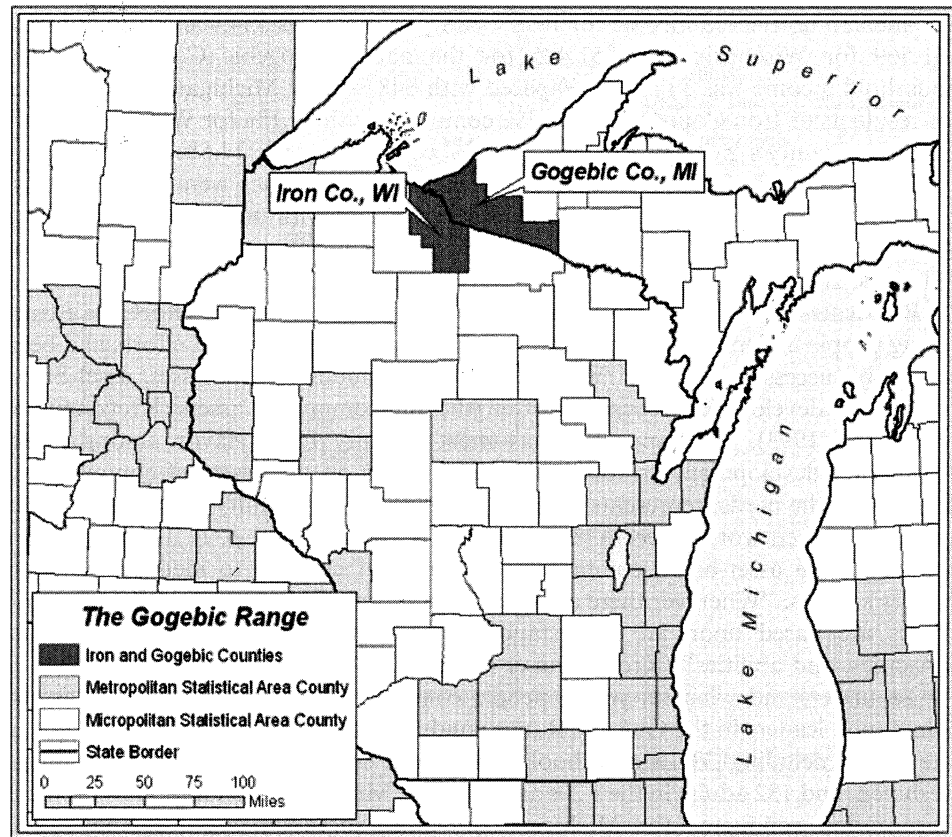


Figure 1. Gogebic Range location map.

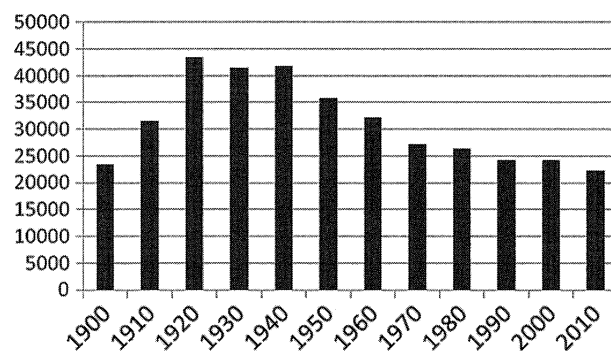


Figure 2. Gogebic Range population trends (1900–2010). Source: US Census Bureau (1900–2010).

17% of Gogebic County residents were under 18 years compared with 14.3% for Michigan residents. Both counties were significantly older than the nation, which had a median age of 36.5 years with 24.6% of its population under 18 years.

Incomes are also significantly lower on the Gogebic Range, and poverty rates and unemployment rates much higher than the remainder of the two states and the US.

The median household income for Iron County in 2009 was \$34,400 compared with \$51,569 for Wisconsin and \$51,425 for the nation. Gogebic County's median household income was \$32,692 compared with \$48,700 for Michigan. Poverty rates for residents of Iron County were 14.2% compared with 11.1% for Wisconsin, while Gogebic County's poverty rate was 17.8% compared with 14.5% for Michigan (US Census Bureau, 2010). In June 2011, unemployment rates were 10.7% in Iron County and 12.5% in Gogebic County. This compares with unemployment rates of 8.1% in Wisconsin, 11% in Michigan, and 9.3% for the nation (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

Residents of the Gogebic Range conducted an asset-based effort to attract young people understanding that traditional economic development efforts had been largely unsuccessful. Rather than focusing on community weaknesses, asset-based community development focuses on strengthening community assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). This approach has most recently found favor among many community development professionals. "This focus on the assets of communities, rather than the needs, represents a major shift in how community practitioners have approached their work in recent years" (Green & Haines, 2008, p. 7). The first step in conducting an asset-based community development effort is to identify the community's assets. "Wherever there are effective community development efforts, those efforts are based upon an understanding, or map, of the community's assets, capacities, and abilities" (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 5).

To understand what its young people consider to be the community's assets, community leaders in the Gogebic Range conducted a survey of 668 young people in late 2008, including 331 high school juniors and seniors, 205 community college freshmen, and 132 adults in their 20s and 30s. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation conducted the Michigan cool cities survey in 2004, asking 13,500 college students and recent college graduates to rate the importance of 31 location decision-making factors (Michigan Economic Development Corporation [MEDC], 2004). Respondents on the Gogebic Range were asked to rate (on a scale of 1–7, with 1 being low) the importance of the same 31 factors in deciding where to live and to also rate their perception of how well their community offers the same factors.

The survey results were used to create asset maps of the range, displaying the 31 location decision-making factors on both the importance (vertical) and perception (horizontal) dimensions. An asset map displaying the values and perceptions of 50 young adult respondents who moved to the community from someplace else was used to identify the area's most marketable assets, as this group most closely represented the target market (Figure 3).

Factors located in the upper-right quadrant were both important in deciding where to live and perceived as a positive feature of the community. Two categories of assets are clearly evident in the upper-right quadrant of the asset map: "nature-based outdoor recreation" and "core community" assets (Table 1). Rather than addressing unimportant factors or those that are not perceived positively, community leaders focused on the 17 assets that are considered both important and positive.

Community residents worked to strengthen, promote, and connect the community's young people to these mapped assets. The over-arching mission of the efforts was to "attract and retain young people to reverse the decades-long population decline of the Gogebic Range" by the year 2020. More than 100 people were engaged in this asset-based initiative, including community and economic development professionals, local government officials, chamber of commerce

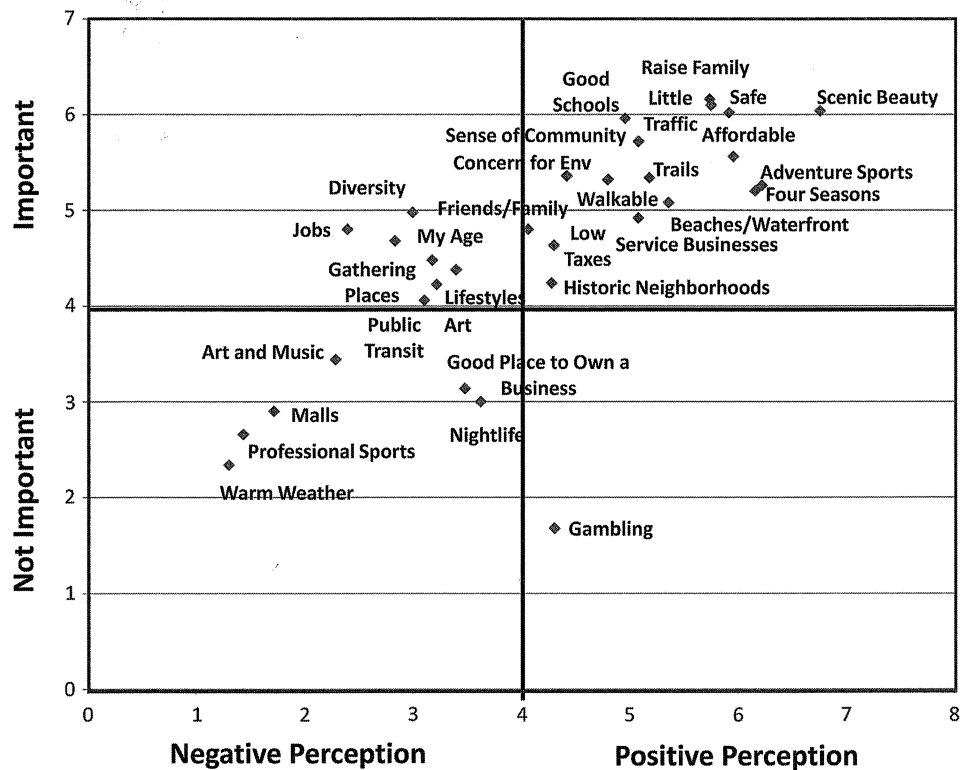


Figure 3. Gogebic Range asset map.

Table 1. Gogebic Range assets.

Nature-based outdoor recreation assets	Core community assets
Lots of natural scenic beauty	A place to raise a family
Easy access to adventure sports	Safe streets and neighborhoods
Near trail systems and parks	A place without a lot of traffic congestion
A four-seasons climate	A good public school system
Easy access to beaches or waterfront	An affordable place to live
	A place with a strong sense of community
	Accessible, walkable streets
	A place with a concern for the environment
	A place without high taxes
	Near small service-oriented businesses
	Near where my friends and family live
	Neighborhoods with interesting and unique historic or architectural character

representatives, educators, employers, business owners, parents, and interested residents of all ages. The initiative resulted in several new collaborative efforts and positive community development outcomes. The question that this article addresses is whether or not these collaborations and outcomes will result in attracting and/or retaining young people to reverse the population decline.

### **Evaluation method**

The Iron County UW-Extension Community Resource Development educator helped community leaders draft a 10-year evaluation plan to measure the effectiveness of the initiative. Rather than waiting until 2020 to determine if the effort was successful, the evaluation plan listed shorter-term measures that could be used to predict success and guide necessary program modifications.

The evaluation plan included Logic models for each of the initiative's three programming areas of strengthening, promoting, and connecting young people to community assets. Logic models assume that changes in learning can lead to changes in action which can ultimately lead to changes in conditions. These models can be powerful planning and evaluation tools for community change. "Logic models show causal relationships as they relate to one another – a systems approach to portraying the path towards a desired reality" (Millar, Simeone, & Carnevale, 2001, p. 1). On the Gogebic Range, each Logic model listed short-term changes in learning and mid-term changes in action designed to result in the desired long-term outcome of attracting and retaining young people and reversing the community's population decline.

The use of the Logic model approach was deemed especially important in this asset-based community development effort due to strong and long-standing support for traditional economic development strategies aimed at job creation at the expense of asset building and a belief among many residents that the community offered few assets that would be attractive to young people. Therefore, initiative participants agreed that educating residents about the economic benefits of strengthening, promoting, and connecting young people to the community's assets would be a critical step before asking the community to conduct an asset-based effort.

The following sections explore each of the initiative's three programming goals of strengthening, promoting, and connecting young people to the community's assets. Each section displays the short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes listed in each of the Logic models with a description of the methods used to measure their effectiveness, including participant surveys, participant counts, key informant surveys, and observations.

### ***Strengthening local assets***

Research supports the efficacy of community development efforts that build on local natural resource assets (Nieto, Schaffner, & Henderson, 1997). "Realizing their advantageous position, knowledge workers choose to reside in amenity-rich areas" (Salvesen & Renski, 2002). Recreational activities offer one amenity resource that is especially effective at attracting and retaining people. In one northern Wisconsin community, 86% of non-resident property owners purchased property for the presence of nearby recreational activities (including an extensive non-motorized trail system), spending as much as \$30 million in the community each year (Berard & Trechter, 2007). The direct economic impact of a regional trail in another northern Wisconsin community was estimated at \$3.3 million annually (Kazmierski, Kornmann, Marcouiller, & Prey, 2009).

The initiative worked to strengthen its "nature-based outdoor recreation" assets by collaborating with local units of government to create a mapped vision for a regional non-motorized trail system connecting all five cities on the range. Initiative leaders created a presentation script and a sample resolution of support for the regional trail and presented the trail concept to each municipality along the proposed

route. The initiative also made numerous presentations to local schools, chambers of commerce, economic development groups, and service clubs and submitted several press releases to the local media to gain a public understanding of the need to strengthen its "nature-based outdoor recreation" assets and support for the regional trail plan. The short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes included in the Logic model for the effort to strengthen the community's assets are shown in Table 2.

Several methods were used to evaluate whether the short- and mid-term outcomes have been realized. The primary method was an electronic survey distributed via email in 2010 to all 120 participants in the initiative. Fifty-two people responded. Respondents represented a relatively balanced mix: (1) 44% grew up in the area and 48% moved to the community from someplace else; (2) 57% were 40 years and older and 43% were in their 20s and 30s; and (3) 42% represented business, 36% represented government/education/health care, and 22% were retired.

Based on the evaluation process used, the short-term changes in learning have been realized. Two of the mid-term changes in action are in place, including the passage of resolutions of support for the regional trail and incorporation of the trail concept into local community development plans. Early progress indicates a high likelihood that the trail will be financed and developed.

*Short-term changes in learning: "Heightened awareness of our nature-based outdoor recreation niche"*

According to the 2010 survey, 74% of respondents agreed that because of their participation in the initiative they have a better understanding of the community's "nature-based outdoor recreation" assets and 75% believe that the public has a better understanding of these assets as a result of the initiative's outreach efforts.

*Short-term changes in learning: "Better understanding of the benefits of strengthening our niche"*

According to the same survey, 83% of respondents agreed that because of their involvement in the initiative they have a better understanding of the economic

Table 2. Logic model outcomes for strengthening its assets.

Short-term changes in learning	Mid-term changes in action	Long-term changes in conditions
Heightened awareness of our nature-based outdoor recreation niche	Resolutions of support for mapped vision	More young people move to the Gogebic Range and stay on the Gogebic Range
Better understanding of the benefits of strengthening our niche	Incorporation of mapped vision into community development plans Communities obtain internal and external funding for development of trail system Trail is developed, maintained, and promoted	Increased number of young people living on the Gogebic Range Reverse decades-long population decline of the Gogebic Range

benefits of strengthening the “nature-based outdoor recreation” assets and 66% believe that the public has a better understanding of their economic benefits because of the initiative’s efforts.

*Mid-term changes in action: “Resolutions of support for mapped vision”*

Every municipality along the proposed trail route formally adopted resolutions of support for the regional trail, including two counties, five cities, and three townships. In addition, three neighboring as well as four chambers of commerce, four school boards, and nine additional community-based organizations adopted the same resolution. Plus, two adjoining cities have passed their own joint resolution of support for a two-city riverside trail system that will connect to the regional trail.

*Mid-term changes in action: “Communities obtain internal and external funding for development of trail system”*

Largely based on strong support from the community, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources has allocated \$500,000 for the cost of acquiring the railroad grade for much of the proposed system. In addition, two cities applied for a total of \$848,000 in grant funding to develop trailheads along the proposed regional trail.

*Mid-term changes in action: “Trail is developed, maintained, and promoted”*

While the trail has yet to be developed, a new “railroad grade technical working group” has been formed. The purpose of this group is to devote additional resources to the detailed process of acquiring the necessary easements for the regional trail.

***Promoting local assets***

People choose to live in places with scenic beauty and high quality of life factors (McGranahan & Wojan, 2007). These quality of life factors are especially important for people wanting to live in small towns and rural areas (Schuett, Jacob, Lu, & Respass, 2008). According to the Michigan Cool Cities Survey, the top 10 location decision-making factors for respondents wanting to live in a small town or rural area are: (1) scenic beauty, (2) safety, (3) affordability, (4) place to raise a family, (5) good schools, (6) sense of community, (7) little traffic, (8) concern for environment, (9) friends and family, and (10) walkable streets (MEDC, 2004). All 10 of these factors are located in the upper-right quadrant on the Gogebic Range asset map.

The initiative worked to promote these assets to the target market of young people living outside of the community. It collaborated with four area chambers of commerce to create the “Beautiful Northwoods Adventure” website promoting both the “nature-based outdoor recreation” and “core community” assets identified in the asset map. The website is being promoted through bumper stickers, posters, brochures, Facebook, and Twitter. Table 3 shows the outcome statements in the Logic model for this effort to better promote the assets of the community.

The evaluation showed that all three short-term outcomes are in place. The mid-term outcomes have been largely met. The target market has accessed the promotional materials and evidence exists that people have considered moving to the range



Table 3. Logic model outcomes for promoting its assets.

Short-term changes in learning	Mid-term changes in action	Long-term changes in conditions
Heightened awareness of community's strengths	Target market will access website, review related promotional materials and consider moving to the Gogebic Range	More young people move to the Gogebic Range from someplace else
Better understanding of the benefits of promoting our strengths		Increased number of young people living on the Gogebic Range
Greater awareness of marketing tools and resources		Reverse decades-long population decline of the Gogebic Range

after viewing the promotional materials. Several people have also requested additional employment or relocation information from the website.

*Short-term changes in learning: "Heightened awareness of community's strengths"*

According to the 2010 electronic survey of 52 program participants, 76% agreed that because of their participation they have a better understanding of the "core community" assets of the community and 67% believe that because of the initiative's programming the public has a better understanding of these assets.

*Short-term changes in learning: "Better understanding of the benefits of promoting our strengths"*

In the 2010 survey, 79% of respondents agreed that because of their participation in the initiative they have a better understanding of the economic benefits of promoting its "core community" assets and 64% believed that the public now has a better understanding of the economic benefits of promoting these assets.

*Short-term changes in learning: "Greater awareness of marketing tools and resources"*

Six participants most closely involved in creating the community website were asked an additional question in the 2010 survey related to this short-term intended outcome. Four participants agreed that because of their involvement in developing the website, they now have a greater awareness of marketing resources and tools to promote the community, while two were neutral.

*Mid-term changes in action: "Target market will access website, review related promotional materials, and consider moving to the Gogebic Range"*

According to Google analytics, the "beautiful Northwoods Adventure" website received approximately 4500 hits and 10,000 page views from 631 cities in 27 countries in its first 12 months. The Facebook page designed to promote the website

currently has 675 fans. The Twitter account has 16 followers. This indicates that people are accessing the website and reviewing its promotional materials. Through observations and anecdotal information, it is clear that many people who are viewing the site are the target market of young people in their 20s and 30s who are not currently living on the range. To determine if, as a result of viewing the materials, they are more likely to move to the range, a second electronic survey was posted on the Facebook page in early 2011. Thirty-three Facebook fans responded to this survey. Ninety-four percent of the respondents believed that the page is an effective way to promote the range as a great place to live and 55% said it has made them more likely to live (either move to or stay) on the Gogebic Range.

The website included a page devoted to employment-related information and a contact page for employment, relocation, and tourism information requests. To date, 32 people requested employment, relocation, or tourism information from this page. These requests were forwarded to the appropriate chambers of commerce, employment agencies, economic development groups, and employers. Qualitative responses to a key informant survey with individuals representing these organizations demonstrated strong support for this approach and cited specific success stories. One chamber official said "I think we should continue with this service. We have sent out quite a few with people following up with the chamber. I think this has been very helpful". One employment agency official said: "I would strongly suggest that you continue. Sometimes we have been able to find opportunities for these people within a very short time". And a local employer said "We have received resumes and are setting up interviews. Please continue, potential employees viewing the website may be the ones that will make a difference in the future as they are probably people that are most interested in coming to and staying in our area".

### *Connecting students to its assets*

The Gogebic Range survey revealed that only 22% of college students and 30% of high school students planned to live on the Gogebic Range. When asked if they would likely return some day after graduating from college or finding a job, this percentage barely increased. After a review of the literature, it was discovered that little research exists to indicate how communities can increase the likelihood that its students will stay in the community or return some day. One explanation for why so few students on the Gogebic Range plan to live in the community after they graduate can be found in the survey results: High school and college students value and perceive many of the assets located in the upper-right quadrant of the asset map much less favorably than adults in the community.

The initiative collaborated with local educational institutions to improve students' perceptions of the community's assets as a way to encourage them to stay or return to the community some day. The initiative partnered with a local high school to offer service-learning opportunities to connect students with the assets of the community. In one project, high-school students photographed natural features of the community and created display boards to share with their peers and others. In a second project, high school students created an all-day learning experience to teach grade school students about the local assets. The initiative also partnered with the local community college to offer a nature-photography lesson. Table 4 displays the intended outcomes listed in the Logic model for this programming element. The evaluation showed that the intended short-term change in learning has been met to a

Table 4. Logic model outcomes for connecting young people to its assets.

Short-term changes in learning	Mid-term changes in action	Long-term changes in conditions
Better understanding of how we can connect students to the community	Students actively participate in programs that will make them feel more connected to the community Increased collaboration between youth service organizations, schools, and other community groups	More area students stay on the Gogebic Range or return some day Increased number of young people living on the Gogebic Range Reverse decades-long population decline of the Gogebic Range

limited degree, considerably less than the changes in learning reported for the first two programming efforts. The mid-term changes in action have also been less positive for this element. Student participants have reported stronger connections to the community, but only one high school has been involved in this effort exposing a minority of local students to the initiative's programming. In addition, virtually no effective community collaborations have been initiated or sustained.

*Short-term changes in learning: "Better understanding of how we can connect students to the community"*

In the 2010 survey of 52 adult participants, 64% agreed that as a result of their participation they have a better understanding of how to better connect students to the community, but less than half (47%) believed that the public now has a better understanding of how to connect students to the community.

*Mid-term changes in action: "Students actively participate in programs that will make them feel more connected to the community"*

In 2010, 10 high school students participated in photography classes and prepared nature photography display boards that they presented to 375 elementary students and approximately 100 high school students and community residents at a community open house. According to a qualitative program evaluation, participants believed they are better connected to the assets of the community as a result of their experience: "I discovered the beauty of our community", "I learned that there are many outdoor activities in our community", and "I learned that there is more to our community than just the things we see in town and alongside roads".

In 2011, 15 high school students created an all-day service learning experience for 138 second and third grade students. The program included presentations on the great variety of outdoor recreational activities available in the community. Twelve high school students completed an evaluation following their service learning experience. Ten of the 12 said their perceptions of the community became more positive because of their experience, while two said their perceptions did not change. Eight said their experience made them more appreciative of living in the community,

while three said it did not make them more appreciative, and one was unsure. One respondent said "I learned that there are a lot of things that we should appreciate more in our area and take less things for granted".

The local community college conducted a nature-photography lesson for its students and the community at large. Four people participated in this event, including three non-traditional college students and one local resident.

*Mid-term changes in action: "Increased collaboration between youth service organizations, schools, and other community groups"*

Collaboration occurred between UW-Extension staff and one local high school and the community college for the service learning and nature-photography projects. However, neither of these efforts has been maintained over time. Initial conversations have been held with local youth service organizations about various ways to connect students to the assets of the community, but no collaborative efforts have resulted from these discussions to date.

### **Implications and limitations**

It is impossible to predict if this initiative will succeed in attracting and retaining young people and reversing the community's population decline by 2020. However, the Logic model shows that several short- and mid-term outcomes have been achieved to increase the likelihood of realizing the desired long-term outcome.

For example, an enhanced understanding of the community's assets and the importance of strengthening these assets helped the initiative gain the necessary political and community support for the proposed trail system. Resolutions of support were adopted by every municipality, chamber of commerce, and school board along the proposed trail route. This led the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to allocate \$500,000 for land acquisition and encouraged local residents to create a committee to coordinate the land acquisition process.

Another example is improved perceptions of the community's assets which led to a collaborative effort to create a community-wide website to promote area assets to the target market of young people living outside of the community. The website and related promotional materials led to more people exposed to community assets and who are now considering moving to the range. In addition, the community now has structural support from employment agencies and chambers of commerce for responding to employment and relocation requests received from the website.

Without the short-term changes in learning (i.e. improved understanding and appreciation of the community's assets), the motivation to mobilize limited community resources may not have been sufficient to achieve the mid-term changes in action that have transpired. And it is more likely that these mid-term changes in action will succeed in achieving the long-term outcomes of attracting and retaining young people to reverse the community's long-term population decline.

One benefit from conducting an evaluation using short- and mid-term outcomes is identifying program elements that are not successful so that appropriate action can be taken in a timely fashion. For example, it is clear that participants struggled with how to connect local students to the assets of the community. Only one of five high schools participated in this effort, the community college program was poorly attended, the effort received little interest from the broader community, and internal

leadership in this programming effort is lacking. To be more effective, initiative leaders must better explain the importance of connecting students to the assets of the community, to key stakeholders, and the public.

A real or perceived limitation to this evaluation effort is that the author was closely engaged in both the initiative and the evaluation of the initiative's effectiveness. Although evaluation specialists with the University of Wisconsin Extension provided technical assistance on the evaluation plan, the plan's implementation would have been strengthened if it had been conducted by a third party.

### Conclusions

The purpose of this article is two-fold. First, it is intended to demonstrate a methodology for evaluating community development programming in a timely and effective manner. Second, it offers evidence about whether the asset-based approach used on the Gogebic Range is successful in attracting and retaining young people. This knowledge may be useful to other community development professionals facing similar challenges in their communities.

Early outcome indicators suggest that a heightened understanding of local assets and the economic benefits of these assets (short-term changes in learning) have led to significant momentum toward the development of a regional trail system and an effective internet marketing campaign (mid-term changes in action). Because these mid-term outcomes were selected based on their success in other communities, it is expected that they will succeed in attracting and retaining young people to reverse the community's decades-long population decline (long-term changes in conditions).

This evaluation process determined that the efforts to strengthen and promote the community's assets will likely be effective in attracting and retaining young people because the short-term changes in learning are in place and because a strong body of research suggests that these efforts will succeed. However, the effort to retain students by better connecting them to the community has been determined to be less likely to succeed. This conclusion was reached by noting that the short-term changes in learning were not strong which likely resulted in less community support and involvement. A lack of research suggesting interventions to retain young people also contributed to the struggles faced in this programming element.

Careful consideration should be given to identifying the true assets of a community before embarking on an asset-based community development effort. Understanding what the local young people consider the assets of the community will be most effective in attracting and retaining other young people. An asset-based approach to attract young people based on what older adults in the community believe are the assets may be less likely to succeed. In this effort, the values and perceptions of local young people were used to create an asset map of the community. This asset map largely guided the effort's programming goals and will increase the likelihood of its success.

It is too early to determine if the long-term intended outcomes of this effort will be realized. However, the short-term changes in learning that have transpired and the research-based mid-term changes in action achieved indicate a strong likelihood of success. Conducting an evaluation method such as the one described here provides meaningful feedback. Limited resources can be allocated to promising programs and timely adjustments can be made to those with less promise.

The evaluation methodology and the asset-based community development initiative on the Gogebic Range may prove to be a replicable model for other community development professionals working in small towns and rural communities facing the loss of young people.

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## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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GUEST EDITORS: NORMAN WALZER AND SAM CORDES

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