

Over the last several years UW Cooperative Extension (UWEX) has undergone a strategic planning process which has helped to define and clarify our collective organizational values. As an organization, we examined the differences between **core values**, which are those *we live by* and are central to our daily life, and our **espoused values**, those that *we think we should have* in order to fulfill our mission and vision.

I found these discussions particularly poignant because I've reflected deeply on the topic of values over the last ten years. What are my values, and why? Are they at the core of my life or am I still aspiring to them in my every day work? Where have I made progress and where do I still have work to do? In this presentation, as I reflect on and summarize my work over the past four years at UWEX, I will evaluate my work according to the value system that I've laid out for myself.

What are my values, and why do I think they're important?

My value system connects the political, spiritual, familial and communal areas of my life. For the purpose of this essay, however, I'll reflect on those values I feel are most important to my work, which are: assets, collaboration, inclusion, and sustainability.

Valuing Assets

To me, the concept of valuing "assets" means taking a holistic perspective and searching for the positive attributes, strengths, capacities, and abilities within people and communities. This value is in contrast to popular perspectives that follow a "needs" based model, which focuses on the problems and deficits in a community and assumes that expertise and answers must come from the outside rather than from within.

Why is valuing assets so important? I believe that the strongest answers and solutions usually come from within (the individual, organization or community), and if we look carefully enough we'll find what we need to get the "job" done.

In 2007, I conducted two applied research studies: an Economic Impact Assessment of Algoma Marina Users (Exhibit #1), and the City of Kewaunee Market Analysis (Exhibit #2). At that time, residents and elected officials significantly downplayed the importance of tourism to local businesses. They did not view tourists as an asset to their community. Many were openly hostile to tourists, believing they were a drain on city services and highly taxed residents. In Algoma, the Marina was seen as a major financial burden to the city, and one that did not benefit residents at all. In Kewaunee, members of the City Council Tourism Committee were very focused on what they didn't have (in terms of infrastructure, such as a state parks), and frequently compared their community unfavorably with other communities, such as those in Door County. "We don't have . . ." was the starter to many discussions. Both cities held a classic, needs-based view of themselves where residents didn't recognize the assets, the good things they did have, and instead focused on the problems and deficits of the community. However, both were open to seeing the results of my studies.

In both of these studies, I conducted the primary research, assembled and wrote the final report, but worked with UWEX specialists to develop surveys and research protocols that would produce the information needed to make decisions and propel a tourism promotion effort. Both studies were documented in written reports which have been posted on Kewaunee County's UWEX website and shared with other UWEX Educators doing similar programming. I also taught the research findings and

recommendations to the Cities of Algoma (Exhibit #3) and Kewaunee (Exhibit #4), three local chambers of commerce, the Kewaunee County Economic Development Corporation (KCEDC), local civic organizations and the County board. Finally, I presented findings of the Algoma Marina study and was on the conference planning committee for the UWEX Tourism Team at the Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism where printed copies of the report were disseminated to approximately fifty individuals.

As a result of these studies a number of decisions were made and specific actions were taken. In Algoma, the research showed that tourists bring significant spending to local businesses. The study also revealed that a significant proportion of Algoma Marina users were from the local area and were disappointed with several aspects of the facility. The City promptly took action by allocating funds for facilities improvements that were long overdue. Algoma Mayor Virginia Haske was pleased by the results and was quoted in the Kewaunee County News; *"A lot of times we hear concerns about what we spend on the marina. The economic impact shows there are several million spent [in Algoma by marina users] above and beyond what we take in for launch fees and slip rentals. It's definitely worth having the marina. It brings in lot of money to the City of Algoma."*

In the City of Kewaunee, the market analysis provided business leaders and local elected officials with a comprehensive picture of who their customers are and where they come from. Perhaps more importantly, as part of the market analysis I facilitated the group in conducting a Business and Attractions Inventory of all the local activities, natural resources and infrastructure of interest to tourists, and paid special attention to those assets unique to our area. In response to my compiled report, the committee showed new energy. The City promptly decided to execute a marketing campaign and to apply for a Wisconsin Department of Tourism grant in 2008. Although their 2008 bid for funding was rejected, the research propelled the City to engage me to organize and facilitate a joint Kewaunee County Tourism Visioning Meeting (Exhibit #5) with neighboring communities. Over twenty leaders from across the County attended, which later became the foundation for the Visit Kewaunee County Partnership. Several ideas were identified as worthy of joint development: a County-wide tourism "organization," a County-wide brand, a County-wide website for tourism, among other ideas that would help both locals and tourists appreciate *all the assets* that Kewaunee County has to offer.

Valuing Collaboration

Collaboration assumes we can accomplish more by working together than we can accomplish by working alone. Why do I value collaboration? I find that I can be more productive and produce higher quality work if I am part of a team working on the same problem. No project illustrates this value better than my work in tourism development.

The County Tourism Visioning Meeting (Exhibit #5) produced a list of activities that could theoretically be accomplished if the three main communities in Kewaunee County could find a way to work together. It had been about twenty years since these communities endeavored to cooperate with one another on the issue of tourism. This inactivity, when combined with a host of economic factors, resulted in relative stagnation of the local tourist economy over that same time period. Attendees of the County Tourism Visioning Meeting agreed to six more meetings to further discussion to see what would develop. I was enlisted to facilitate and set an agenda for cooperation. After several strained meetings that focused on turf issues among the chambers of commerce, I used conflict resolution practices to push the group to go

for a “quick win” rather than trying to resolve long-standing issues. If the “quick win” was successful, they could then determine the future of the group. They ultimately decided to develop a joint website highlighting the County’s assets and history, and linking visitors to local businesses and community organizations’ websites.

As trust grew and a common agenda developed, the group decided to formalize into the Visit Kewaunee County Partnership (VKCP). As part of a comprehensive strategy to build capacity for the VKCP and the Kewaunee County Economic Development Corporation (KCEDC), I facilitated the meetings, drafted organizing documents and memorandums of understanding, and negotiated with their fiscal sponsor, the KCEDC. Local businesses and municipalities started taking notice of our good work. The web blog www.visitkewaunee.com (Exhibit #6) was launched in spring of 2009 with the help of an intern whose stipend was paid for by a UWEX District Resource Management grant. Additional donations from public and private sources began to come in to support our efforts. Our initial vision for having a collaborative promotional effort that highlights all of the County’s assets was becoming a reality.

The web blog was clearly an early success for the group. We decided to move on to the next action step and in 2009 I led the coordination and authorship of a \$38,400 Wisconsin Department of Tourism Joint Effort Marketing (JEM), Destination Marketing Year One grant proposal (Exhibit #7). Our application received high praise from the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, and it is now being used as an example for others applying to that program. The group received follow-up funding from other public and private sponsors, and funding from businesses through advertising sales. The JEM grant led to the development of a series of promotional pieces (Exhibit #8). In this effort, I guided the VKCP in developing a concept, wrote copy to support our promotional theme, and helped champion the promotion with local stakeholders, such as the KCEDC (Exhibit #9). I also documented the impact of that promotion through an evaluation (Exhibit #10) which was submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. The evaluation found that traffic to www.VisitKewauneeCounty.com had significantly increased, and hotel revenues in Algoma had increased by 6% (impressive given the difficult economy). We have also received very positive feedback from the local business community because we created promotional opportunities that were previously unavailable and/or unaffordable for their business.

In September, 2010, I again led the effort to submit a Year Two JEM Grant to continue the promotion in 2011. After an analysis of what went well and what could be improved, the Visit Kewaunee County Partnership received a \$35,400 grant to implement our plan.

Our small “quick win” collaboration made possible a full-blown initiative with sponsorships and supporters which has served as a launching point for continued educational programming in tourism. In addition, the VKCP partners have begun the process of relinquishing local priorities in support of a mutual vision for change. In this case, even limited collaboration led to progress where there had been none in two decades, as well as enthusiastic commitment to further progress through continued collaboration.

Valuing Sustainability

The concept of sustainability, broadly defined, is the ability of a program to effectively maintain momentum over time until its life comes to a natural or predetermined end. The ability to self-maintain is central to any community development program I’m working on. My goal for these programs is that they

keep the originating vision in focus and sustain positive change over the long-term. How can I help develop programs that sustain themselves in the future without my direct leadership? How can I plant seeds that grow into independent vibrant organisms?

The two research studies mentioned earlier from 2007 (Exhibits #1 and #2) planted two seeds. One was the tourism seed, as described in the previous section. The other was the local consumer seed. Combined, the studies indicated that local businesses rely too heavily on seasonal sources of tourist income; that local residents did much of their consumer spending outside of the County. These findings led to concern about the resilience of local businesses to withstand economic downturns. The same group that formed the Visit Kewaunee County Partnership decided to host an educational forum on the topic of Buy Local.

The Kewaunee County Buy Local Forum (Exhibit #11) was very successful with over sixty participants representing the business, nonprofit and government sectors. At the forum, I made an educational presentation, “By Our Bootstraps: Growing Kewaunee County’s Economy” (Exhibit #12), which outlined the economic leakages associated with locals shopping outside of the Kewaunee. The forum evaluation (Exhibit #13), indicated that 79% (N=21) of respondents planned to make changes in their own purchasing activities that would increase the proportion of money spent locally. And, 100% of respondents said they would consider joining a Buy Local initiative should one be organized for the area.

The forum organizers agreed to host a series of follow-up breakfast meetings, and I was asked to facilitate. After several meetings with good attendance from the business community, the group identified goals and action steps. The group divided into smaller workgroups and a steering committee was formed. A public launch of the initiative was scheduled and private sponsors were obtained. With funds from a UWEX Eastern District Resource Development grant, we were able to hire a summer intern to help develop educational and promotional materials, including a Business Recruitment Packet (Exhibit #14) which could be given to prospective member business and community organizations, and a Speaker’s Bureau Training Kit (Exhibit # 15), which built the capacity of volunteer speakers going to community-based organizations to spread the word about the Buy Local Initiative. We also launched a website www.buylocalkewauneeconomy.com (Exhibit #16), which provided a business directory and web presence for many businesses that previously had none.

At the close of 2010, twenty-two months after the Initiative’s launch, the Initiative has grown considerably and has close to 130 members in the business and nonprofit communities. And, we have seen great progress toward the agreed-upon shorter-term outcomes concerning increasing community knowledge and awareness. A 2010 Follow-Up Survey (via SurveyMonkey) of Buy Local Initiative Participants (Exhibit #17) found that 74% (N=61) of respondents have seen some benefits from participating, including: 64% have greater knowledge of local products and services, 56% believe that people are more aware of the importance of buying local, and 46% report having a larger local business network. Success with longer-term outcomes of increased sales dollars and increased customers was more limited, with only 12% of respondents reporting progress. Nonetheless, the group agrees that the Initiative is off to a great start, and plans future evaluations in order to track future progress.

At the beginning, the Buy Local Forum organizers determined that for this initiative to be sustainable, it would be need to be led by the business community for the business community. It would be our job to recruit and train volunteer leaders to carry out the work of the Buy Local Initiative.

Nearly two years after the launch, that is exactly what has happened. My role as initial facilitator, researcher, educator and project champion has largely been supplanted by others who have taken the leadership mantle, and with great success. Although I am still integral to the public education component of the initiative, the initiative that I helped found and form has taken on a life of its own with leadership, capability and funding to sustain it.

Valuing Inclusion

In my view, inclusion takes the two values of collaboration and assets to another level. Inclusion means going out of one's way to include all types of people, even when it isn't easy or convenient. Why is this important? Because different stakeholder groups have unique perspectives and experiences that can support or challenge any proposal for change. Without a truly inclusive process, it may be impossible to learn why a proposal succeeded, or more likely, failed.

This last value is best illustrated in my organizational development work with nonprofits. My work started with a County-wide 2007 Capacity Assessment of Kewaunee County Nonprofit Organizations (Exhibit #18), which surveyed all types of civic and social organizations in the county such as sporting clubs, churches, and homeowners associations in addition to traditional 501 c3 charitable organizations.

The findings from this study led to two series of workshops. The first workshop series had three parts, took place in 2007-2008, and addressed the topics of fundraising, marketing, and volunteer management. The second workshop series had five parts. I co-developed the curriculum and co-taught it with Robert Burke, Community Development Educator in Door County, with grant sponsorship that I obtained from the Dominion Foundation. This series took place over 2009-2010 and focused on nonprofit board leadership development (Exhibit #19). We focused on topics such as "Essentials for Nonprofit Leaders" and "Succession Planning for Nonprofits" (Exhibit #20) in an interactive and engaging format. Participants were very satisfied with their learning experience, as shown by the overwhelmingly positive evaluation (Exhibit #21) where 84% of participants indicated an increase in knowledge of the topic.

These workshops led me to many additional follow-up instructional consultations with individual nonprofits about specific organizational development issues. A number of these organizations engaged me in full-scale, in-depth planning exercises, such as strategic, facilities, business, or fundraising planning. In all of these planning processes, I would attempt to push the organization beyond their comfort zone to include traditionally underrepresented groups, with the goal of helping them to reach a more lasting and satisfying result.

For instance, in 2008, the Kewaunee County Economic Development Corporation (KCEDC) was two years old, had just undergone an executive transition, and was ready to begin a Strategic Planning Process (Exhibit #22). In helping board members understand the broader context in which they were working, we conducted a stakeholder analysis which revealed two business sectors, small retail and service businesses, to which the Board had paid little attention. The energy of the board was very focused on developing the "big two" industries in our County: manufacturing and commodity agriculture.

I pushed the Board to do a KCEDC Economic Development Survey (Exhibit #22, Appendix E) of smaller local businesses to gather their input. The results were surprising to the board. The survey showed that smaller businesses thought that not enough attention was paid to growing and supporting small businesses

already located in the County. They also thought that tourism was an important component to the economy that should be nurtured more than it had been.

In response to this survey and the strategic planning process, KCEDC was moved to dedicate some minimal resources to tourism, and work more closely with smaller, locally owned businesses. Without that survey, the KCEDC may not have agreed to be the fiscal sponsor for either the Visit Kewaunee County Partnership or the Buy Local Initiative.

The KCEDC planning process also spurred the County-wide branding initiative for economic development purposes, which was one of the action steps in the Strategic Plan (Exhibit #22), and one of the projects identified by the County Tourism Visioning Meeting (Exhibit # 5). My role was to provide research, education, and process facilitation in advance of creative development for the brand. I organized and facilitated a series of Branding Feedback Sessions (Exhibit #23) where I educated community members on the purpose of a County-wide brand. I also gathered community input for the development of a brand blueprint and the final branding positioning statement, which I then drafted (Exhibit #24). The full brand position and accompanying artwork was approved in October, 2010 by the KCEDC board and was formally announced to the community at an unveiling party. A brand splash site was also developed, www.KewauneeCountyBrand.org, for which I led copy development.

Afterward, I conducted an Evaluation of KCEDC's Strategic Planning Process (Exhibit #25), in which I asked all participants how they felt the various components of the process went. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and a full 77% of respondents felt that the survey of small businesses increased their ability to identify concerns and priorities. 100% of respondents felt that the action plans would be implemented.

In another example of valuing inclusion, I facilitated and provided educational programming to support the County Fairgrounds Facility Planning Process. At the initial planning committee meeting, of the seventeen people present, I was the only female. Also, none of us was younger than 41 years in age. When I pointed out that the group inadequately represented women and younger members of the community, some people in the room seemed quite taken aback. I don't think they had thought about the make-up of the group in this way. Fortunately, several agreed and we set about to actively recruit more women to the committee and devise a way to collect the voices of younger adults and youth in the planning process. Again, after the process was complete, I conducted an evaluation of the planning process, sending a survey out to all participants. The results indicated that 100% of respondents agreed that "The planning process was clearly communicated and followed," and "Stakeholder groups to the Fairgrounds had adequate opportunity to participate in the process," and 100% of the planning participants rated Claire Thompson's educational assistance to the planning process as "above average" or "excellent." One representative comment from that evaluation: "*Claire . . . brought together stakeholders with vastly differing views and some conflicting views and had them work together for a common purpose. It was an unbelievable experience!*"

The County Fairgrounds planning process resulted in a Five-Year Development Plan Concept Framework (Exhibit #26) that received unanimous support from a very diverse group of stakeholders. The framework was then passed on to an engineering and architectural firm to assess costs associated with the recommendations. Due to the availability of federal funding streams to help offset some of the costs, the Kewaunee County board voted 17-2 to move forward with the first two phases of the project to develop

the County Fairgrounds. This resulted in a \$2.3 million public investment (Exhibit #27), which is an enormous commitment for a small County like Kewaunee. The process was roundly applauded by Board members for being timely, thorough, and inclusive, and was particularly appreciated by our Board Chairman, Bob Weidner (Exhibit #28). In this instance, the valuing of inclusion brought about important county investment, as well as a great sense of unity within the community.

Where have I progressed and where is there room for growth?

Valuing Assets

In terms of valuing assets, the most challenging situations are when I'm meeting with individuals attempting to start a small business, which happens more and more frequently with the economic downturn. Too often folks have been unemployed for some time, may not have a basic high school education, are living at the margins of our community, and have an idea about how they can make a small amount of money to support themselves and their family but just need x, y, or z to get them going. In a number of cases, it has been very challenging for me to be encouraging in spite of their difficult circumstances. One practice that I've found particularly helpful, to them and to me, is to start the conversation by finding out about their skills and what they feel they're good at. Sometimes they themselves haven't thought this through. It is very rewarding to see their confidence grow with their ability to verbalize their own strengths. It also reminds me that no matter a person's challenges, he or she is nonetheless an asset in our community and it is my job to give them educational tools to succeed. I have one simple outcome that I look to achieve with each phone call or meeting, and that I ask about at the end of each consultation: "do you know what your next step is in pursuing your idea?" If they answer "no, not really," I work with them until they can give a firm "yes."

Valuing Collaboration

For me, living out my value of collaboration has been the easiest in my County work because it is the only way to get anything done! In my first year at UWEX, I engaged multiple UWEX specialists with my research projects. I completed a two-year service as Community, Natural Resources and Economic Development Eastern District Liaison, and just began a two-year service on the Department of Community Resource Development (CRD) Research and Studies Committee. I collaborated with Diana Tscheschlok, CRD Educator Fond du Lac County to teach a Community Organizing In-Service for the UW CNRED Eastern District, and Chad Cook, Basin Educator UWEX, and Paul Roback, CRD Educator Washington County, to teach an In-Service on Evaluation for the UWEX CNRED Eastern District. I have also worked with Rob Burke, CRD Educator Door County, to organize and facilitate the very first joint Door-Kewaunee Counties Legislative Days, which was also a first for Kewaunee County as they had never had a Legislative Days experience before.

Valuing Sustainability

Clearly my biggest successes with building sustainable programs and capacity development are in the cases of the Buy Local Initiative and the Visit Kewaunee County Partnership. However, it is both disappointing and ironic that my biggest challenge in sustainable community development has been with my work on the topics of environmental sustainability. In 2007 and 2008, I helped coordinate local municipalities and successfully apply for Recycling Efficiency Incentive grants to all municipalities in

Kewaunee County from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Although I did produce some effective educational pieces, including the web site Kewaunee Recycles! (www.kewauneeeco.org/recycle), - which is dedicated to educating citizens about recycling options and proper waste disposal in the County, - the municipalities didn't wish to pursue further activities or funding as a whole County.

I also worked quite extensively in a community collaborative to implement two educational forums, "Sustaining Our Water" and "Sustaining Our Food." Although forum evaluations were very positive from those who attended, attendance was low and the collaborative lost steam. Thus, although I have implemented some valuable educational programs, none of them has taken root into broader community-wide initiatives, as with tourism development or Buy Local. I am reviewing these efforts to ascertain what I might do differently in the future.

Valuing Inclusion

Kewaunee County is relatively homogeneous, racially, ethnically and religiously. The result is the need to think about "inclusive environments" in a more comprehensive way. As illustrated in the Kewaunee County Fairgrounds example, gender and age inclusivity is still an issue in many instances. Finding "safe" ways to bring newcomers to the table is always a challenge, one that I will continue to work on and champion. One other area where I've had success is in providing research and facilitative leadership to a budding Caregiver Coalition for Kewaunee County. In the Caregiving in Kewaunee County 2010 Needs Assessment (Exhibit #29) and follow-up organizing discussions, we proactively sought the input of older adult care givers and care recipients to determine effective strategies for supporting this community.

Another dimension I've been focusing on in my work is counteracting stereotypes. I am still surprised by assumptions I encounter about people who may identify themselves as other than heterosexual, Caucasian, European, or Christian. I don't always feel professionally "safe" in gently correcting negative stereotypes. Although I have taken the UWEX Multicultural Awareness Training, I've always found this to be a challenging topic that warrants continued self-reflection and skill building.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

In spite of some challenges, I believe that valuing assets, collaboration, inclusion and sustainability are core to my work, and guide my actions and the resulting contributions to my community and profession. In the process of writing this reflection, I have identified another value to espouse: Acceptance. Acceptance would be defined as accepting people in whatever state of human condition they find themselves in, meeting them where they are, and working with them to identify and accomplish their own preferred future without judgment or presupposition. I choose this final value because even though my work is primarily in economic and organizational development, first and foremost I work with people. Tapping this very "person-centered" strength would serve me well in my work in the County, with UWEX and in the profession.