New leaders and volunteers emerge.

Outreach and engagement reconnect residents. Participation increases and leaders emerge.

In Williamsport (pop. 28,000), residents could see that their downtown was burgeoning while surrounding neighborhoods were experiencing economic disparity and social challenges. At a Heart of Williamsport town meeting, residents in one neighborhood expressed concern about the loss of a local supermarket and lack of a safe place to gather and socialize.

Several residents stepped up and led the creation of a community garden, bringing together environmental organizations, local businesses and a corps of volunteers, to provide fresh vegetables to the neighborhood. Now residents with gardening expertise are mentoring others, while parents and children tend the garden together. The neighborhood has been transformed through the leadership of those who know it best.

Trust is built.

Finding common ground through Heart & Soul builds bridges.

Like a number of smaller municipalities, Upper Chichester (pop. 17,000) is composed of a variety of neighborhoods. As the township began preparing a Comprehensive Plan, leaders adopted the Heart & Soul approach to ensure that residents from all neighborhoods had a chance to weigh in.

Turnout was high at community forums to get started with Heart & Soul. A pastor of a church whose members are mostly African American said his congregants “are starting to feel as though community leaders are finally hearing their concerns and that’s inspiring them to get more involved.” Senior citizens came out, too. Long-time residents Diane and Agnes have been friends for 74 years, attending local schools together. Now they are volunteering together to collect residents’ stories for Heart & Soul.

As in other Heart & Soul communities, some who had not traveled in the same circles are coming together, trusting each other, and strengthening bonds – based on a shared love of place and the desire to make it better.
The City of Meadville (pop. 13,000) is the county seat in a picturesque corner of northwest Pennsylvania. Among the things its residents want most is to improve their city’s built environment, especially in the downtown. My Meadville, as the Heart & Soul project is named, partnered with city government to update zoning so that historic preservation and increased walkability will become priorities for its downtown area.

A team of residents calling itself the HYPE squad painted a mural downtown, and My Meadville led to a new coffee shop. The Meadville Teen Lounge is still active, a few years after residents determined that teens needed a safe place to go. Economic opportunity, a high value on small businesses and community identity – all are building new social and shopping venues unique to Meadville.

Pride is celebrated.
One of the things residents notice, even early on, is how Community Heart & Soul uncovers a sense of pride among townspeople.

Cameron County (pop. 4,600), in the heart of the Pennsylvania Wilds, has experienced the rise and fall of multiple industries like many other rural areas. A grassroots community project began to enhance the existing sense of pride in what makes the county so special – and it turns out that people were eager to tell their stories. When residents share on social media something they love about the county, they use the tag #CamCoProud. This humanities-based approach highlights the awesome things that only Cameron County can offer – and brings a pride-filled perspective to new opportunities.

By asking people what they love about Cameron County, Heart & Soul got people thinking in terms of their county’s assets and possibilities. This became a celebration of pride in a special place they share.

History & culture are honored.
Heart & Soul helps towns rediscover the importance of history and culture in creating a town’s unique character.

When residents tell their stories, the rich history of a place can be rediscovered or uncovered. That was the case when the Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul Team heard from a resident about a long abandoned African-American church built by her grandfather circa 1870. The story rallied the community to protect and preserve the church along with the nearby cemetery, where her grandfather’s gravesite is located along with several Civil War veterans. Now, the site is on the county’s list of historic places and a door has been opened to dialogue about the African-American history in the community.