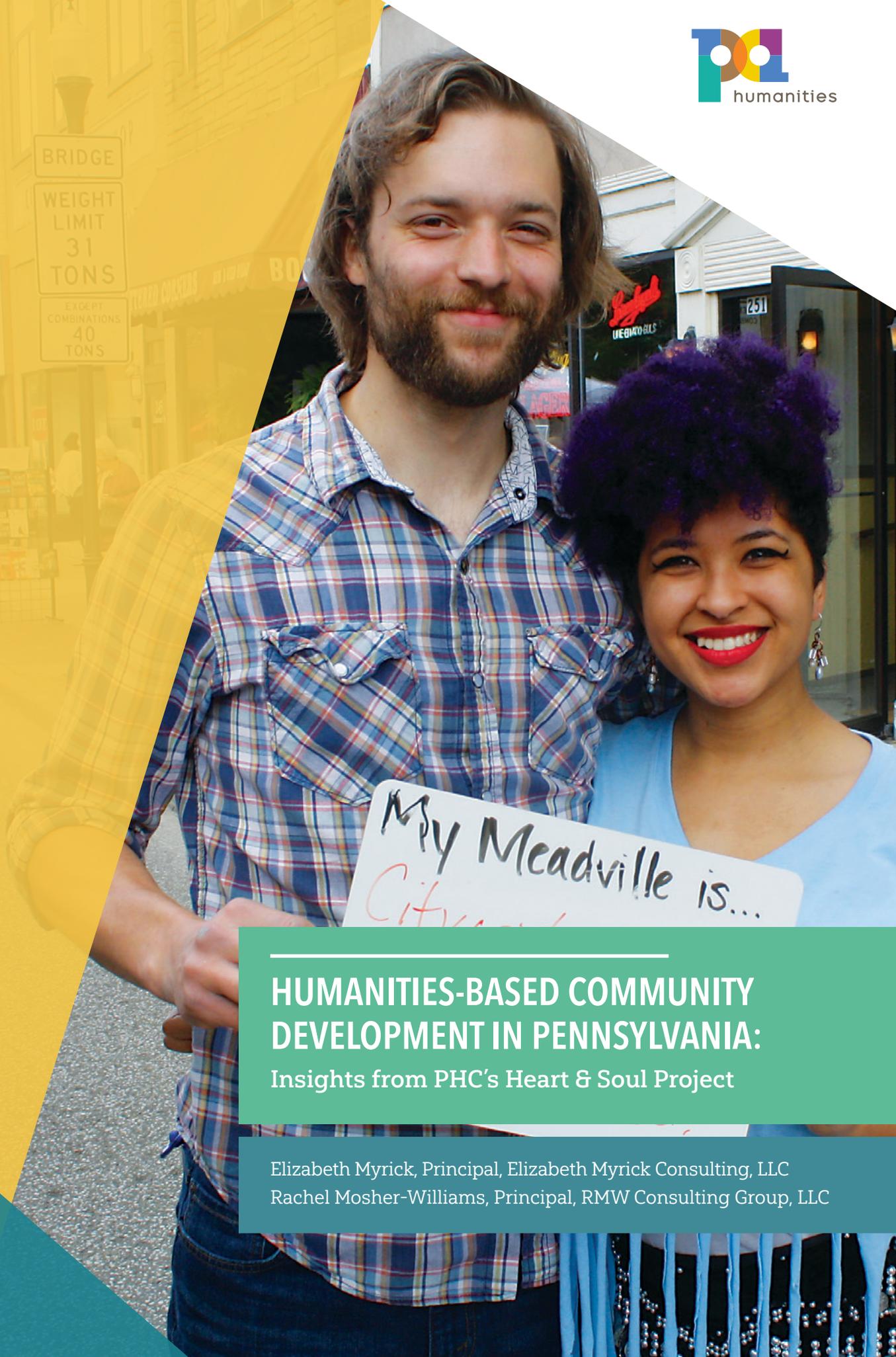


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HUMANITIES-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN PENNSYLVANIA:

Insights from PHC's Heart & Soul Project

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“Humanities play a huge role if you are going to work in community—I never would have thought so before.” –Greater Carlisle Interview

About the Pennsylvania Humanities Council & Humanities-Driven Community Engagement

PHC was founded in 1973 and is one of 56 state and territorial humanities councils in the United States. Each is a private, non-profit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

PHC believes the humanities inspire people to grow their potential and shape an equitable society. Technical resources, particularly humanities skill-building, leadership, and advocacy, are core to PHC’s strategy to light people’s minds for civic action—not just for the benefit of the individual, but for the benefit of the community as a whole. PHC puts the humanities in action to create positive change by putting the tools and process of its trade—like storytelling, historical perspectives, interpretation, creativity, and deliberative civic dialogue—in people’s hands to: document their own culture and create their own knowledge; develop today’s leaders and create vibrant local economies; and celebrate cultural diversity and homegrown talents. PHC’s humanities-based community engagement model helps to bridge, redefine relationships, and share power among residents, groups, and institutions.

Activating the humanities can make much-needed connections, make space for new voices, create empathy and belonging, and employ storytelling for resiliency and healing in communities grappling with past and current challenges. Community Heart & Soul®, along with Chester Made and Teen Reading Lounge, has become part of PHC’s on-the-ground learning with Pennsylvania residents, cultural leaders, and youth, demonstrating why the humanities is a relevant tool for social change and personal growth.

FOREWORD

PA Community Heart & Soul has come a long way since we first launched our three pilot sites in 2016. The program has expanded to 14 locations, including our four newest communities along the Route 6 corridor in 2021, and more will soon be added through the Orton Family Foundation's new national seed grant program.

Inspired by their experiences, the volunteers and coordinators of this successful, growing statewide initiative have become ambassadors for humanities-based community development: receiving official coaching certificates, leading trainings and webinars, and speaking about their experiences at regional and national conferences. They've even created resident-driven public art projects to celebrate their community values, including a mural to memorialize the over 600 African Americans buried in unmarked graves at Lincoln Cemetery in Carlisle, a nature-inspired aluminum art installation on the Snodgrass Building in Meadville, and two beautiful mosaic pillars entitled "The Lady of Light" at the Pajama Factory, an historic factory compound in Williamsport.

Back in 2019–2020, in the midst of our pilot, we consulted with Elizabeth Myrick and Rachel Mosher-Williams because we wanted to understand how residents experienced the humanities and its impact on their lives and communities.

We asked:

- How were Pennsylvanians connected to each other through stories, ideas, and experiences that changed lives and transformed communities?
- In what ways were Pennsylvanians and PHC championing and redefining the role the humanities plays in educating residents and strengthening communities?

We were learning as we went and developing our own approach to grantmaking that emphasized inclusivity. We centered the humanities in the Heart & Soul process and focused on making it work *with*—rather than *for*—residents in our communities. Our Learning Project with Myrick and Mosher-Williams was similarly participatory and embraced that ethos of learning and adapting in real time.



Laurie Zierer, executive director of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council

Based on our on-the-ground experiences and Myrick and Mosher-Williams' findings, we believe this is the time when the humanities are "strategic and germane." The specific histories and players within a community must be well understood to address unjust differences in power and privilege. As Myrick and Mosher-Williams stated, "The humanities can and must play an even greater and perhaps uniquely competent role helping communities collectively navigate across difference and inherent tensions in positively disruptive community engagement."

This learning brief presents cross-site results to continue the dialogue with place-based funders, municipal planners, cultural organizations, civic engagement researchers, and community organizers seeking inclusive, people-centered change. Here, you can join PHC on our journey with a Learning Advisory Group of residents, funders, and on-the-ground partners in the Pennsylvania towns of Carlisle, Meadville, and Williamsport. You can learn what happened, how we processed the findings, and the important themes, lessons, and recommendations that emerged from the research. Vignettes about the communities are also presented, bringing the research to life and providing an unvarnished look at the real-life successes and challenges of our pilot communities as they navigated this new humanities-based approach to community development.

We invite you to join us in this learning as we continue to transform our practice with Pennsylvanians across the state.



Laurie Zierer
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Humanities Council

“In your connection with others, you realize more about yourself. You are more than you thought you were.” –Williamsport Interview

PHC’s Community Heart & Soul®

As it is deployed by PHC, Community Heart & Soul® is a humanities-based, resident-driven community planning process that cultivates a shared sense of belonging among residents, engages them in thinking critically and creatively about community life, and involves them in decision-making and development as a way to strengthen a town’s social, cultural, and economic vibrancy. The relationship PHC has forged with the Orton Family Foundation and Community Heart & Soul® is an expression of its commitment to create a new, more inclusive, more equitable relationship among and between similarly missioned organizations.

PHC believes people can shape the future of their communities through the power of stories and strong relationships. Key to the Community Heart & Soul® process is learning what matters most by gathering hopes and ideas from residents. Residents collect and analyze stories from different groups in their community, especially those not typically invited to make decisions. Story gathering can take many forms, from notes on a chalkboard to in-depth interviews. It all comes together to paint a picture of what matters most to residents, to build social capital, and address community culture as a first step in community and economic development. This becomes the basis for building a community’s shared desires, which informs a community’s unique action plan and understanding of their identity and agency. As a result, communities become more connected, self-reflective, resourceful and resilient.



Harriet Gumby at the Mount Tabor AME Zion Church cemetery in Mount Holly Springs. Photo credit: Heather Shelley

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Residents share stories and ideas at a *My Meadville* summit.

INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

“I like how PHC gets community engagement away from the good old boys and into a more diverse public. Helps show both the rationale for and way to do this.” –Funder/Partner

In February 2019, Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC) launched the Heart & Soul Learning Project to seek greater clarity about the direct experience of participants using a humanities-driven community planning effort in three pilot locations: Greater Carlisle (2018 population of Carlisle urban cluster 37,695), Meadville (2017 population 12,973), and Williamsport (2018 population 28,462). PHC wanted to discover how connecting residents to each other through stories, ideas, and experiences changed lives and transformed communities, as well as how PHC and residents through this initiative were championing and redefining the role the humanities plays in the life of our communities. PHC had partnered with Orton Family Foundation on their field-tested Community Heart & Soul® method, which centers community planning around reconnecting people to each other and the many assets of their town through stories. PHC contracted with consultants Elizabeth Myrick and Rachel Mosher-Williams to design and conduct the Learning Project.

Using participatory methods and an appreciative inquiry approach, the consultants identified significant lessons from each site—and shared themes across the sites—to help PHC deepen relationships with stakeholders of Heart & Soul and residents of Pennsylvania, implement Heart & Soul in other Pennsylvania communities, and support and advocate for similar humanities-based efforts for equitable community and economic development.

In 2019, PHC made grants totaling \$201,750 to 28 community organizations, including for Heart & Soul implementation. More than a transactional grantmaker, however, PHC has sought to *partner* with communities, peers in philanthropy, and fellow humanities-focused organizations, within and outside of Pennsylvania. Between 2016 and 2019, the time period covered by this learning project, PHC awarded the three pilot communities a total of \$318,850. Pilot sites raised an additional \$420,224.15 in compliance with PHC’s requirement as a federal/state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities that grantees



Meadville residents engage in conversations during a Community Heart & Soul event.

contribute an amount at least equal to the grant, either through cash donations or in-kind services. PHC and Orton staff also provide a community of practice, training, and coaching estimated at a cost of over \$50,000 per community. Support includes workshops that train communities on how to implement strategies and methods for each phase, and direct coaching of the project coordinator and team members to build their capacity to use humanities-based methods for community engagement and planning. Residents build skills in listening, empathy, story-gathering, critical-thinking/analysis, collaboration, open-mindedness, and understanding historical context. All the funds PHC re-granted to the sites came from its annual NEH grants.



Williamsport resident Star Poole (right) was inspired to get more involved in her community through engagement with Heart of Williamsport.

How does PHC's coaching build capacity for humanities-based engagement?

Residents:

- ▶ ...are trained in how to identify sources of demographic information and think critically about who lives, works, and plays in the community.
- ▶ ...explore the history, culture, and current context of their communities to better understand how decision-making happens in their town and explore growth possibilities.
- ▶ ...learn to identify barriers and challenges to public participation in civic engagement and work to actively engage missing and marginalized voices.
- ▶ ...brainstorm and test creative grassroots strategies to engage residents in the civic engagement process by holding block parties, story circles, in-home community discussions, and potluck dinners.
- ▶ ...build interviewing and listening skills by inviting community members to share their unique experiences through storytelling.
- ▶ ...learn to analyze community stories to identify shared themes and values.
- ▶ ...learn how to work with the community to gather, prioritize, and implement action ideas using their values as a decision-making lens.
- ▶ ...learn to honor community gifts and assets; new leaders are recognized and cultivated.

Community Heart & Soul has become part of PHC's growing portfolio of field-defining work demonstrating why the humanities is a relevant tool for community change and individual growth. Learning was a core value and essential component of PHC's approach, because staff members were learning the Heart & Soul process along with the pilot sites. "We were learning as we went" was a common refrain from PHC staff and pilot communities. The Learning Project provided a distinct and complementary opportunity for reflection and dialogue. With guidance from a Learning Advisory Group composed of local residents and funding and implementation partners, the consultants captured what happened and how these lessons might inform future practice. Looking back over the last 3–5 years and across the three sites, the findings sought:

1. To capture and compare *'what'* happened in the three communities,
2. To help the Learning Advisory Group and other audiences process the findings and begin to ask, *'so what?'*
3. To clarify and revise the preliminary findings into a statement of *'now what?'* based on feedback from the group.

A summary of findings, organized by theme, a set of overarching lessons, and a discrete set of recommendations follow from site visits in each community conducted between February and November 2019. The research concludes with recommendations for communicating lessons with audiences positioned to assist PHC in deepening relationships, implementing Heart & Soul in other Pennsylvania communities, and advocating for similar efforts led by humanities councils and other cultural institutions.



Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul's Volunteer Fair and Community Dinner was one of many local events created to encourage resident participation.

PA COMMUNITY HEART & SOUL TIMELINE

2013

PHC shifts organizational direction to focus on civic engagement and education

2014–2015

Collaboration between PHC and the Orton Family Foundation begins

2015–2016

PHC announces three pilot sites: Meadville, Carlisle, and Williamsport

2018

Heart & Soul launches in Cameron County and Upper Chichester

2019–2020

Myrick & Mosher-Williams begin research on Heart & Soul Learning Project

2020

Beaver County Heart & Soul launches (Rochester, City of Beaver Falls, and Ambridge); Dillsburg launches

Pilot sites officially designated as PA Community Heart & Soul towns by PHC

2021

Route 6 Heart & Soul launches—Youngsville, Tidioute, Carbondale, and Wyoming County

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Significant Findings From Pilot Sites: The “What Did We Learn?”

Based on interviews, focus groups, document review, and analysis both apart from and alongside the Learning Advisory Group in 2019–2020, a set of key themes emerged around which findings (events, quotes, reflections, interpretations) are organized. This report presents the most compelling and consistent cross-site themes supported by informants in all three pilot communities. Our research has surfaced additional site-specific themes and findings. When instructive, we have shared them.

1. PHC’s Heart & Soul pilot communities are examples of the humanities in action.

As the first of its kind on several fronts, the PHC-Orton Heart & Soul pilot communities partnership acquitted itself remarkably well, setting the stage to disrupt traditional community engagement and to achieve even greater impacts over time. Participants — both community members and funders — described how the humanities were at the core of the Heart & Soul experience.

PHC’s Heart & Soul sites advanced a set of humanities-informed skills designed to drive civic engagement and well-being, including: active listening, interviewing and storytelling, dialogue and idea-generation, action planning and agenda-setting, collaboration, communication, accountability, inclusiveness, follow-through, and continuous learning.

Community informants agreed, noting that the humanities became better defined and more meaningful to many of the volunteers because of their participation in PHC’s Heart & Soul project:

“Through H&S, I’ve seen how the humanities are relevant to my work, with reconciling the past, race and racial justice, humanities give us ways to talk about and process difference, process trauma.” Greater Carlisle Interview

One funder suggested, “Heart & Soul makes the humanities more accessible.”



2nd Street Community Garden in Williamsport was built by residents after Heart & Soul conversations revealed a need for fresh produce.

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The result of these humanities-informed Heart & Soul processes is the public articulation of shared values. Beyond ‘words on paper,’ the community values flow from residents and back into specific action plans. All three communities signaled a commitment to ‘living these values’ in current and future actions. Holding one another

“The story gathering was literally the first time people had ever been asked what they/the town needs. We never really ask ourselves and our neighbors what we need. The process really helped people develop a vision for the town.” –Meadville Interview

and leadership accountable to shared values is the mark of a strong community and —one might predict— a sustained role for the humanities. After the Heart & Soul process in Carlisle, community members, artists, and staff at the Cumberland County Historical Society renewed discussion about the history of local Lincoln cemetery, dating back to at least the early 1800s, where over 600 African American residents were buried unrecognized. The borough recently issued an official resolution of apology for the treatment of this cemetery and the African American community.

2. Inclusive, people-centered, humanities-driven community change is happening in the three Heart & Soul pilot communities.

Communities are constantly changing and evolving. Because the Heart & Soul model has been introduced into such dynamic environments, it is difficult to draw a singular line from Heart & Soul activities (cause) to the many community impacts (effect) seen to be catalyzed, influenced, and bolstered by Heart & Soul. In fact, both the Heart & Soul model and PHC’s people-centered, humanities-driven approach seek to build intentionally upon the leaders, assets, and energy already present in each place, further complicating direct attribution or ‘credit.’ Nevertheless, tangible and intangible community change can be associated with implementation of Heart & Soul and PHC’s approach in each community.

Some of the most common responses offered when researchers asked, “What has changed?” were about new voices (especially African American residents, younger millennials, people of color, youth, low-



Remembrance and rededication ceremony at Memorial Park, Lincoln Cemetery (Carlisle).

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income renters, and politically under-represented groups) engaged in planning for their community's future and activated to preserve their history, address racial injustice and economic disparity, open new businesses and create community space and gardens, run for political office, and engage municipalities in adopting their community's values.

“Another key to Heart & Soul’s success is that it did not presume a single goal. We didn’t go into communities/neighborhoods with a plan, we just asked questions. No idea was considered unworthy and that made it a collaborative project.”

–Williamsport Interview

In each of the communities, the people-centered, humanities-driven approach, as well as Heart & Soul values—*ask what matters most, include everyone, and play the long game*—seemed to be taking hold. One informant spoke of the campaign platform of two candidates running for Meadville City Council, noting, “Look, this platform *is* Heart & Soul issues, informed by the Heart & Soul process and values, it’s the way we think about community now.”

3. The Heart & Soul model has been pursued successfully in each community, maintaining the model’s structure while adapting specific Heart & Soul techniques in ways that “fit” the character and culture of each pilot community.

The Heart & Soul *model* pursued by PHC in partnership with the Orton Family Foundation is an effective approach to humanities-based civic engagement—similar to, but distinct from other approaches to engaging people in community priorities and decision making. Tours of Heart & Soul sites, as well as interviews and focus groups, surfaced the ways Heart & Soul techniques were adapted and improved with potential for replication in other Heart & Soul communities:

- Although the Greater Carlisle team followed the model and went where residents were already gathering and felt most comfortable, they learned they had to build trust within the African American community and recognize that people are the experts of their own history because in Mount Holly “the stories that have mattered were



Residents of Greater Carlisle share their experiences, ideas, and hopes at a Community Heart & Soul event.

white ones.” They also found that intentionally engaging young people in leadership and story-collecting may mean pushing adults to relinquish space and power.

- Meadville’s team also used the process to find and amplify the voices and stories of residents historically excluded and learned how putting the humanities in action led new residents to seek public office. They found Heart & Soul tools aimed at expanding participation also needed a humanities-based approach to analyze how power dynamics and stories have historically worked in the community, if their work was not going to be detrimental to the most vulnerable in organizations and communities.
- The Williamsport team learned that when they asked for community input, without a hidden agenda, and they really listened and honored different perspectives, the model created a much-needed space: “Because it named the elephant in the room, we could begin to address the marginalization of African Americans and new communities.” They also learned that PHC’s and Heart & Soul’s people-centered, asset-based approach helped with engaging the media for valuable input and disrupted problem-focused framing in reporting.

How these tactics were pursued with a humanities lens, however, proved as important as *what* was done. For communities used to having less-than-authentic citizen review processes, PHC’s Heart & Soul “turned typical planning upside down.” Welcoming people from where they were and the open-endedness of the process created new energy and ideas, activating business owners in Meadville to

“People do feel more empowered to just be vocal and visible in their communities.” –Meadville Interview

start an online fundraiser and generate the seed money to open a neighborhood coffee shop when they heard during the story-gathering process that residents needed a community gathering place.

4. Fiscal sponsors each played an instructive, albeit different, role for the pilot Heart & Soul communities.

While essential to the legal and fiduciary responsibilities required by the Heart & Soul model, fiscal sponsors were the means to creating the distributed, decentralized power dynamics sought by a people-



Michael and Tonya Reed’s coffee shop, Tarot Bean Roasting Company, emerged from My Meadville community conversations. Photo credit: Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

centered approach. As one interviewee suggested: *"H&S is a process, not a product."* Having a fiscal sponsor can help keep Heart & Soul from "belonging" to a single organization with a singular and established mission, especially since Heart & Soul is a decentralized process.

Future communities will no doubt benefit from the lessons gleaned from the ways Greater Carlisle (Greater Carlisle Project/Dickinson College and Cumberland County Historical Society), Meadville (Meadville Redevelopment Authority), and Williamsport (Susquehanna Greenway Partnership) worked with different fiscal sponsors. Ideally, the fiscal sponsor plays a distinct but equal role alongside the leadership committees and the residents themselves. A balance must be struck to integrate Heart & Soul with existing community assets without assuming that Heart & Soul resources can be applied to existing, predefined projects.



My Meadville's action plan was revealed to the community at the "World's Largest Potluck (in Meadville)." Photo credit: Meadville Tribune

The research suggests that the pilot Heart & Soul communities would have benefited from better understanding the "why's" and "how's" of inviting and working with a fiscal sponsor. Even the most well-intended fiscal sponsors can have blind spots. Trust must be placed in the ability of fiscal sponsors to represent the culture and "moment" a community is facing. Meadville's impressive engagement of the business community reflects how steady economic decline and disinvestment buoyed the desire to invest specifically in home-grown, local entrepreneurs and a shift away from outside business to "save them." As Greater Carlisle experiences the opposite economic trend

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and loss of a rural and agricultural past, is it any wonder that historical and cultural preservation became a priority? Would stronger business ties have followed from Williamsport being sponsored by the city

“The fundamental mission is reaching unheard voices, and probably anchor institutions do not know those voices—which is why the leadership committee is so essential that you have a real community network analysis. Surprising things about our community —there are thousands of Bosnian refugees, yet pre-H&S Greater Carlisle Project had not tapped into that community. Decentralizing power is the point of H&S and is simply not a match with leadership by a traditional anchor institution.” –Greater Carlisle Interview

or an economic development agency? Perhaps, perhaps not. The findings suggest, instead, the best way forward would be to refine and communicate roles based on the culture and attributes of the community and its potential fiscal sponsor, rather than dictating a single right way.

5. Sharing power among and across civic entities, anchor institutions, private and public sectors, individuals, and resident groups is both essential and one of the biggest challenges for the Heart & Soul pilot communities.

Heart & Soul communities found themselves disrupting expectations about the roles of all civic entities, anchor institutions, the private and public sector, individuals, and resident groups. They came to understand just how traditional processes and planning gives municipalities, large employers, and anchor institutions significantly more power than is given to individual residents and smaller organizations and had actively kept certain individuals, entities, and entire groups from participating.

Each community grappled with creating inclusive, ‘power-sharing’ civic engagement in their own way and within their own unique



Heart of Williamsport brought new voices to community discussions.

contexts. Managing these power dynamics is a key to achieving Heart & Soul's potential. It goes to the heart of people-centered community change: moving from negligent (or worse) power dynamics to power sharing is painful, shocking, and necessary. Each community faced the temptation to ignore or disavow municipal actors and anchor institutions (whether a college or a chamber of commerce). The Heart & Soul process gave the pilot communities the chance to name issues that had gone un-named for a long time. But, once identified, each community struggled to decide what to do next.

A humanities-based community engagement model like Heart & Soul has the *potential* to bridge and redefine relationships among groups and institutions. Activating the humanities can help to bring much-needed perspective shifting, empathy, storytelling, and healing to communities grappling with past and current challenges. Intentionally seeking new and previously under-represented (even actively ignored) stories disrupted the traditional planning process. The pilot communities are hungry for techniques and strategies to make change happen, to *share power across* rather than *wield power over*. A more intentional and explicit understanding of power is a critical first step, a step for which the humanities is particularly suited.

6. The Heart & Soul pilot communities raised the importance (and challenge) of attracting and deploying resources (financial, human, technical assistance) for people-centered, humanities-driven community engagement.

PHC dedicated significant resources to each of the communities and, in part due to the matching requirements of PHC grants, each community, too, raised and dedicated significant resources to its Heart & Soul effort. Capturing the ripple effect of PHC's investments in the pilot Heart & Soul communities, however, need not and should not focus exclusively on its own and others' financial investments. PHC played a dual role as both a funder and a partner in this effort. As a public agency, grantmaker, grant recipient, Pennsylvania-focused agency, and philanthropic peer, PHC sought to balance all its roles by developing authentic, honest, and fruitful relationships. The pilot communities appreciated the delicate balance PHC maintained. More than one informant described PHC as a "safe" partner, with whom they shared real problems and sought advice. Nevertheless, the



Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul Project celebrated local pride by encouraging residents to share what they loved about their community.

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dominant philanthropic culture of funder-prescribed timelines and 'checklists' added pressure to communities' efforts in ways that were not always commensurate with the financial and technical assistance provided. This research seeks to bridge this divide by presenting the perspectives of Heart & Soul funders and community informants regarding the availability and use of resources.

“With this pilot group, we had a hard time articulating what our total financial commitment to each project was going to be and what expectations there were for each site to raise additional funds or in-kind support ... Our model seems to be evolving so funding sources and new Heart & Soul communities are cultivated and brought on board together. Formally describing this would make both prospective funders and prospective communities more comfortable in engaging with us.” –PHC Staff

Perspective from Funders/Stakeholders/Partners

Both PHC and its funders noted how supporting an open-ended process versus the more typical program support was difficult. Processes focused on community inclusion and culture change may not follow anticipated timelines and do not predict specific deliverables. As much as PHC sought to be an “honest broker” among funders, stakeholders,



Meadville residents share stories and plan for the future at a Community Heart & Soul event. Photo credit: Meadville Tribune

and the pilot communities, everyone noted a tension between accountability to the funders, the Heart & Soul model, and deadlines and accountability to an authentic and participatory community engagement. The communities, too, recognized how PHC's role as both a "grantee" and "funder" influenced their work together. Everyone agrees that identifying and tapping into new partners and funders is important; so, too, does everyone acknowledge it will take sophisticated messaging and creative "network mapping" to determine shared interests and comfort with funding a process toward outcomes—rather than the more traditional delivery of defined services.



My Meadville volunteers provided an engaging community mapping activity as part of their outreach to residents.

Perspective of Heart & Soul Communities: Focus on Human Resources

While project coordinators, who were hired by communities to help manage the process on-the-ground, had some experience with fundraising, the hectic pace of the later phases left both the project coordinator and the burgeoning stewardship committees without the time and perhaps confidence to raise the funds needed to keep Heart & Soul going. Even when values are aligned, local funding is limited. As a result, Heart & Soul is weaving its way, both implicitly and explicitly, into a variety of existing and new projects and entities and even political campaigns. This may be exactly the right way for the spirit and values of Heart & Soul to live on. It does, nevertheless, risk eroding the integrity and singularity of PHC's humanities-driven, people-centered community engagement.

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Human resources are, of course, the most valuable asset in any community. To different degrees, the communities struggled to balance tasks assigned to the project coordinator versus tasks shared among the volunteer committees. The project coordinator must be supported by partners, funders, and volunteers. Moreover, the three communities saw volunteer attrition in years 3–4, just as the model sought to transition from Phase 3 to Phase 4 and fundraising and program development grew more urgent.

“Advocating for the relevance of the humanities to vital services is not just the icing on the cake or an extra.”

–Funder/Stakeholder Interview

Financial, human, and technical assistance resources are interconnected and may demand more of the “Pennsylvania version” than its previous applications by Orton in other states. As PHC advances further into humanities-driven, people-centered community engagement, it will be important to bring funders along while remaining sensitive to the power imbalance by respecting the variety of financial, human, technical assistance resources required to pursue the Heart & Soul model in Pennsylvania.



Residents of the Hope Station neighborhood of Carlisle brought leadership and insight to the Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul project.

LESSONS

Learning Across Pilot Sites: The “So What?”

Based on the findings and each associated theme, a set of discrete but related lessons have been drawn from the experiences of PHC, funders and stakeholders, and especially the three pilot communities. By collecting the most compelling and consistent *cross-site* themes, we hope to draw out the most applicable and instructive lessons for future Heart & Soul Communities (in Pennsylvania and beyond) and for anyone pursuing people-centered, humanities-driven community change.

1. The humanities have an essential and on-going role to play in people-centered community engagement, authentic and sustainable community change, and overcoming setbacks and resistance.

As a publicly-funded, statewide institution, PHC has greater potential to sustain its impact than a private philanthropy or a single community acting alone. As evidence of its transition from re-grantor and speaker bureau to community builder, PHC with its Heart & Soul Pilot

“...the process is providing space for the middle or lower-income folks to participate. In those places, local government is weak and things that should be happening are not, so H&S provides an opportunity for residents to engage in getting stuff done. It is also pushing locally elected officials to move based on the engagement and empowerment of residents.” –Funder/Partner

Project is making the case for the humanities’ explicit relevance to community well-being and resilience. PHC’s experience to date in the pilot communities suggests PHC (and the humanities) can and must play an even greater and perhaps uniquely competent role helping communities collectively navigate across differences.



Dickinson College students use ground-penetrating radar to survey Mount Tabor AME Church burial grounds in Mount Holly Springs. Photo credit: Heather Shelley

PHC's project is bringing to light the ways past, current, and emerging narratives help communities shape what it means to live in *this* place, at *this* time, within *this* context. Now may be the time when the humanities could prove most strategic and germane. While differences in power and privilege are present almost everywhere, the specific histories and players within each community must be well understood to address, rather than ignore, or replicate these dynamics.

In spite of participants' desire—and the explicit Heart & Soul value—to include everyone, PHC's Heart & Soul pilot communities surfaced complex and persistent *structural* inequities. The pilot communities are poised to advance a form of humanities-informed civic engagement which could begin to address individual and structural inequities constraining communities and the United States, in general.



Volunteers at the 2nd Street Community Garden in Williamsport.

2. People-centered community engagement is an investment in inclusive, sustainable community change.

PHC's people-centered community engagement puts people first and trusts in them to have the talent, experience, and know-how to make needed change—whether it's in developing their own downtowns with homegrown businesses, preserving a local church to honor the history of African American residents, or taking their futures in their own hands to grow a community garden when a local store closes. PHC and the three Heart & Soul pilot communities have successfully achieved the inclusive, people-centered community change described

LESSONS

in the communities' original Heart & Soul applications, PHC's strategic plan, and the Orton Foundation's aspirations for the Heart & Soul model. Moreover, this kind of inclusive, people-centered community change responds to a hunger felt by communities for authentic storytelling (and listening) that leads to participatory decision-making and action.

While faced with both similar and distinct challenges, each pilot community succeeded by emphasizing community assets rather than deficits and by exemplifying the Heart & Soul values: *ask what matters most, include everyone, and play the long game*. The differences between the communities (in terms of population, culture, and

“Racial injustice in Williamsport is a fact: so, what are we going to do about it? We can't have two economies, two communities, it won't work. We have to come together. If we want black folks to spend money downtown, how do we make that happen?”

–Williamsport interview

economy) informed their tactics and resulted in differing action plans and impacts. Each community is a living laboratory with expertise in building community, and we are hopeful that Pennsylvania planning and civic agencies, state humanities councils, and philanthropic organizations tap into this vital resource.

3. Setbacks in and resistance to the power-sharing aspects of Heart & Soul implementation are inevitable; pursuing equity explicitly and transparently is essential when faced with setbacks and resistance.

Even as the pilot communities achieved remarkable results, each of them also faced resistance and setbacks. Based on the experience of the three pilot communities, it appears essential that timelines and technical assistance incorporate space for reflection into each phase. Cross-site reflection and learning, particularly through regular “community of practice” meetings facilitated by PHC and Orton, helps participants to see how the limitations faced by a single individual or community actually speaks to consistent, structural resistance to change. To take the next step toward achieving democratic participation and equity, however, communities will need coaching



Children's Community Heart & Soul art project.

LESSONS

and tactical support. They may *understand* that right-sizing the roles of public officials, agencies, and anchor institutions and confronting white-dominant culture is a desirable destination. Most lack a road map for getting there. Further complicating the journey is the recognition that no single ‘right way’ of sharing power will work for every community, everywhere.

Since the pilots have launched, Orton’s addition of a *Readiness Assessment* has helped communities to assess and prepare for the kind of positive disruption with which the pilot communities grappled. Beyond the *Readiness Assessment*, an *explicit* analysis of power—individual, interpersonal, and structural—woven throughout the phases might have given PHC’s three pilot communities the tools to talk about and make transparent the historical power dynamics at the source of resistance and setbacks.

The Heart & Soul process is ripe for a more explicit understanding of and commitment to not simply naming, but *reconciling*, the harm done by non-participatory, unequal, oppressive, even violent power structures. The humanities offer a framework and methodology for both naming and reconciling inequities. The humanities can help communities first envision and then work toward the equitable communities of the Heart & Soul model. While it can be tempting to move right into the ‘do-something-about-it’ phase, truly recognizing and reconciling the harm done is an essential step if communities are to avoid repeating the unhealthy dynamics Heart & Soul seeks to turn



Heart & Soul storytelling workshop hosted by the Cumberland County Historical Society.

upside down. When power is recognized and shared, actors are better able to decide when to claim space and when space is better and more equitably yielded to others. Recognizing when, why, and how to do so can take time and resources, and perhaps even more so, empathy.

4. Humanities-driven community change requires financial, human, and technical assistance resources, including: credible structure and skilled leadership; equitable and responsive investments (long-term, flexible, well-structured); and diverse investors (local, regional, national, public, private).

A combination of financial, human, creative, social, intellectual, health, historical, built environment, environmental, and recreational technical assistance resources are essential to healthy communities. An appreciation for the range of resources each stakeholder brings to the Heart & Soul process can reduce some of the anxiety and differences in financial power inherent in the funder/grantee relationship.

“Through cross-site communication, we were able to see what other people were experiencing ... About halfway through, we realized that it wasn’t healthy to compare such different communities. Accountability is important but reaching artificial deadlines or checking off boxes seemed artificial.”

–Community Heart & Soul Interview

A willingness to adjust timelines, make applications and reporting less burdensome, and generally meeting communities where they are—each is a step toward the type of power sharing in fundraising that will result in more realistic expectations of humanities-driven community change. Our findings suggest that PHC’s rigorous application process, the addition of the Readiness phase, and the shared values we have noted throughout this report may be sufficient to meet the “compliance” needs of most funders. Flexibility and candor might be considered a higher and better aspiration, going forward.



Taytum Robinson-Covert, part of the youth group at Hope Station in Carlisle, used story-collecting to help address racial bullying in the local school system.

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Finding funders who are already aligned with this approach can make the path less lonely and risky for PHC too. Working with communities to map the range of resources being brought to the project is one way funders can model a new, more expansive, more instructive approach to resource development. Fundraising skills might become one *among* many types of expertise sought and shared across fiscal sponsors, project coordinators, leadership, and volunteers. This type of training could help to build stewardship capacity into the program from the start.



Community Heart & Soul helps build connections with existing assets and resources, such as volunteer groups like West Side Neighbors Association in Carlisle.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The "Now What?"

1. Activate the humanities in ways that communicate PHC's and the humanities' explicit role in community engagement and the Heart & Soul process.

Why? Asking as many residents as possible open-ended, assets-focused questions (*what do you love about living here?*) turned typical community engagement upside down and put residents and their talents and lived experience in the lead. Community priorities are surfaced and seen, rather than presumed and reinforced. Trust and power is built. By providing new ways to share *what is loved* (whether the arts, environment, sense of place, cross-cultural experiences, historical and emerging community assets), multiple, even divergent, narratives are given space for exploration and understanding. Differences *can* be discomfiting; luckily, the humanities offer pathways toward empathy and creativity as community values and priorities are shared, negotiated, and renegotiated. The ability to grapple with difference, empathize, and forge ahead is the hallmark of a resilient community. PHC is positioned to codify this activation in a set of standard practices that prioritize people via the humanities to accelerate and optimize the success of Orton's model.



My Meadville invites residents to "tell your story."

PHC'S STORY

PHC Pivots to Activate the Humanities in Pennsylvania Communities

It is no easy task to shift a 40-year-old institution, moving it from one way of pursuing its mission to a new way of working. In 2013, PHC sought to do just that. Its board, staff, funders, and volunteers had first to envision and then to operationalize an entirely new role for itself and for the humanities. Externally, Pennsylvania's residents, other humanities councils, its Pennsylvania partners, agencies, and fellow grantmakers had to trust in PHC's vision and see the potential it represented.

It began in 2013 as a “reimagining” of how PHC might approach advocacy and visibility for the humanities. Seven years, two strategic plans, and three Heart & Soul pilot communities later, PHC has successfully re-positioned itself both internally and externally. Gone is the more passive “advocate for,” replaced by an increasingly agile, responsive community partner working alongside residents, chambers of commerce, local entrepreneurs, elected officials, schools, historical societies, national organizations, and state agencies. Today, PHC is poised to activate the humanities in ways it could never have predicted when it was founded in 1973.

PHC’s 2019–2021 strategic plan seeks to “put the people of Pennsylvania first by focusing on two core areas: civic engagement and education.” Both areas can be exceedingly idiosyncratic, influential, and very much in need of *humanities-driven* change. PHC’s civic engagement efforts, best exemplified by its investment in Community Heart & Soul, found ways to connect these stakeholders around common values and vision by *activating the humanities*.

To do so, PHC sought greater competency in community engagement strategies, aligning with the Orton Family Foundation and its Community Heart & Soul model, with a specific set of adaptive goals in mind:

- To have a comprehensive framework for community engagement that includes the humanities;
- To get training in community engagement in the humanities and to be able to subsequently provide training and capacity-building for grantees;
- To connect the arts and culture sector to community and economic development efforts;
- To test, measure, and understand how the humanities work in the Heart & Soul framework.

Having inspired the Orton Family Foundation to establish its first partnership with a statewide intermediary organization (and a *humanities council* at that), PHC focused on Pennsylvania’s greatest asset—its people. PHC invited communities across Pennsylvania to join a pilot effort to launch a humanities-driven Heart & Soul community engagement effort. Three very different communities—Greater Carlisle, Meadville, and Williamsport—facing similar and different challenges, answered this call. Each agreed to learn as they went just what *humanities-driven* community engagement would look like.



Residents gather at the My Meadville Values Summit.

At first, the “humanities” meant asking for and documenting, through open-ended questions, the stories of as many residents as possible—regardless of status and privilege. This made sense, everyone thought, since the humanities are stories, stories that evoke empathy, explore culture, create art, and surface new narratives:

- In Greater Carlisle, African American students from Hope Station, an after-school community center, were trained to conduct interviews and collect stories from residents, empowering young people to create the Carlisle Youth Council, all students and student-run, to present to the school board and host a Social Justice Forum in October 2019.
- In Meadville, the Ideas Summit brought a diverse group together and “something clicked: residents learned how to work together on community projects, making tangible the ideas of community celebration, togetherness, connection to common values, and what matters most.”
- In Williamsport, *From the Heart of Williamsport*, a storytelling film celebrating “what we love about our community” premiered at the Community Arts Center. It attracted a diverse audience of thousands, many of whom had never visited the Arts Center before.

Humanities-driven activities provoked wonder, pride, even love by residents in the pilot communities:

“The blessing of getting to know people through their stories”

“Feeling connected to our town through relationships”

“Empowered students to lead the conversation”

“Working together to get the [projects] done”

“Love listening and learning with people”

“Realizing that we all share the same values.”

What happened next, however, helps us see how activating the humanities subtly changes the soul of a community. Activating humanities, in the PHC’s Heart & Soul pilot, helped move communities from exclusion to inclusion, from project-centered to people-centered, from a culture of *us/them* to *ours*:



Meadville residents share why they love their community during a Community Heart & Soul event.

of just-moved-here residents, young people, and people of color. Meadville intentionally engaged lower income, non-property-owning residents, aspiring entrepreneurs, and a younger generation of civic-

“I continue to see people who found their voices through their involvement in *My Meadville*—people who had never done anything like that before and who likely never would have if not for *My Meadville* and especially the people who helped

mindful volunteers. Williamsport gave voice and a political platform to residents affected by but not typically included in community decision-making. The varied plans emerging from each community illustrates the richness, depth, and creativity of people-centered engagement. In the pilot communities, Heart & Soul has unleashed what is defined in physics as *potential energy*, energy that is ‘possessed by a body by virtue of its position relative to others, stresses within itself, electric charge, and other factors.

MEADVILLE'S STORY

People-centered Community Engagement Empowers Meadville

Five years ago, if you had asked Autumn Vogel if she saw herself winning election to the Meadville City Council, she admits she might have laughed. Mike Crowley, news reporter for *The Meadville Tribune*, makes the link between *My Meadville's* community engagement strategy and Autumn's candidacy: “I continue to cover Meadville for the Tribune, and as I cover public meetings and events, I continue to see people who found their voices through their involvement in *My Meadville*—people who had never done anything like that before and who likely never would have if not for *My Meadville* and especially the people who helped gather stories.”

It was 2016 and Autumn's position as Community Development Coordinator with Meadville's Redevelopment Authority drew her



Autumn Vogel, Coordinator for *My Meadville*, speaking at a Community Heart & Soul Event.

more deeply into community planning, as she administered the city's Entrepreneur Accelerator Grant Program and the Commercial Facade Improvement Program. In 2017, after PHC named Meadville one of three pilot Heart & Soul Communities, Autumn's role expanded to include Project Coordinator for *My Meadville*. From that point, in guiding Meadville's Heart & Soul journey, Autumn unknowingly traveled toward an objective she never realized she might want: *elected office*. At the heart of both Meadville's and Autumn's journey has been *people-centered community engagement*.

As one participant noted, "Many people saw [*My Meadville*] as a glimmer of hope for Meadville and got involved because Heart & Soul was bigger than themselves and brought people who would otherwise be ignored into community engagement."



My Meadville participatory art project.

Of the three Heart & Soul pilot communities, Meadville is the smallest of the three cities and faces perhaps the most challenging economic conditions with non-resident corporations becoming the area's largest employers, shifting generational dynamics, and aging housing and infrastructure. According to 2019 Census population estimates, the city is 87.2% White, 5.4% African American, 2.3% Hispanic or Latino, and 6.1% Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and two or more races. Less populated, with 12,973 residents, and more geographically isolated in the northwest corner of the state, the City of Meadville has long embodied a self-reliance and 'can-do' spirit often seen in communities left to blaze their own trail. Recognizing this self-reliant spirit as a huge asset, *My Meadville* went one step further, very intentionally seeing and engaging all Meadville's residents in community decision making.

For Meadville, this meant going to public housing communities, providing childcare, and other ways to meet people where they lived, worked, played, and prayed. Once more intentionally engaged and heard, residents grew less skeptical and more willing to attend community gatherings. These events brought together aspiring entrepreneurs, a younger generation of civic-minded volunteers, young families, as well as working- and middle-class residents.

The result? One participant captures how *My Meadville* combined the city's *can-do spirit* with Heart & Soul's *people-centered engagement*: "Most of all, I was impressed that the project actually got things done. Initially, I assumed that the project would largely consist of people

"Getting new voices to seek public office is a real win for My Meadville. The pillars they are running on are informed by My Meadville's outcomes."—Meadville Interview

talking and talking about what should be done. It quickly became clear that there was a plan for avoiding that pitfall. Nearly as quickly, results — people taking action in response to the topics that evolved from story gathering activities — could be seen as well."

Cross-pollination of ideas and commonly shared values emerged from *My Meadville's* gatherings. An awe-inspiring calendar engaged more and more people around a shared love for the community: potluck suppers, 'main street' (in this case, Chestnut Street) business promotional events, Winter Fest, Second Saturday Community Markets, Thankful Thursdays, the Meadville Area Teen Lounge, the Meadville Independent Business Alliance, the Meadville Neighborhood Center, the Northwest Pennsylvania Investment Cooperative, Common Roots, and the Grow Meadville community gardens. All were designed intentionally to help residents cross those invisible yet stubborn social, cultural, and economic barriers which keep neighbors separate and disengaged.

By emphasizing *people-centered* community engagement, *My Meadville* tapped into the city's diverse population — not just the usual suspects — and a set of shared values and priorities emerged. Rather than a few professionals drafting a plan for comment, *My Meadville* convened people in celebration, around open-ended questions, and in support of local businesses, in ways designed to connect, bridge, and bond. One participant described why *My Meadville's* tactics were



Through events and activities Meadville residents discussed and shared what they loved most about their community.

so effective: “The most important thing that happened was the act of asking people and really listening. It has transformed how they think about the town and what they expect from people in power, from each other and from themselves.”

My Meadville's action plan, tied to eight shared community values identified during engagement activities, represents a shift from institution-driven to people-centered community change. It has empowered residents, like Autumn and her running mate Larry McKnight (whom she met through *My Meadville*), to seek leadership positions to move the action plan forward and make Meadville a better place to live: “*My Meadville* events were more diverse than any group I’ve seen before in Meadville. Something clicked: we learned how to work together on many community projects.”

By unleashing the *potential energy* residing in Meadville’s people, *My Meadville* tapped into an almost effervescent “can-do” spirit buoyed by civic pride. While more difficult to quantify, this civic pride is proving to be Meadville’s superpower. All three PHC Heart & Soul pilot communities animate the notion that within every community lurks a superpower — *people-centered potential energy* — just waiting to be unleashed.

3. When facing setbacks and resistance, assess power dynamics and pursue equity explicitly.

Why? Orton’s current Heart & Soul materials are accurate in describing the process as ‘positively disruptive.’ By actively seeking diverse participation and including voices not always invited into community planning and engagement, Heart & Soul unsurprisingly, and in fact, quite intentionally, faced latent and active tensions among and between groups. This transforming space can be uncomfortable for everyone—regardless of status, power, and privilege. Articulating shared values offers an entrée into naming and negotiating different perspectives and living up to aspirations as individuals and communities. When faced with resistance that went beyond individual differences in experience and opinion, it became clear that more complex, entrenched structures seemed to reinforce traditional decision making by dissuading participation and undermining change. Explicitly valuing equity can help communities first notice, then name, and then renegotiate the power dynamics being exerted and reinforced



Lindsay Varner, Cumberland County Historical Society, holding the S.K. Stevens Memorial Award from Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations. The award was received for exceptional work on the Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul project.

when Heart & Soul practices and plans challenge “how things are done here.” Writing about racial justice, equity, and the importance of being

“One of the strengths of the project is bringing storytelling to the process, and storytelling is really powerful in so many ways—building local pride, for people to feel heard, from a marketing perspective. –Funder/Stakeholder Interview

in relationship with one another when disrupting white dominant culture, Kad Smith, Project Director, CompassPoint, writes,

Embodying racial justice and equity means rejecting the notion that taking the time to make room for personal stories, voices, and experiences isn't valuable. Transitioning from a community built on extractive relationships to one of mutual care and support means making room for courageous conversations and healing. It means sharing our politics in the deepest sense by inviting us to share what drives us to make change in the world. It means fundamentally thinking about the way we relate to one another, finding safety in our similarities and solidarity in our differences.¹

Humanities-driven Heart & Soul community engagement both prioritizes and creates space for courageous relationships. Focusing even more intentionally on equity could provide the healing for which so many communities are yearning.

GREATER CARLISLE'S STORY

Gathering Stories Advances Equity in Greater Carlisle

Greater Carlisle is a region in transition. Located in South Central Pennsylvania, Carlisle was built on agriculture and manufacturing and is home to the 200-year-old Dickinson College. With expanding revenue from construction of large warehouse facilities and an emerging 'commuter' population, Cumberland County is the fastest growing in the state. With a 2018 population of 37,695, this “urban cluster” — including the city of Carlisle, the more rural Mt. Holly Springs,

¹ <https://equityinthecenter.org/we-cant-work-towards-racial-justice-and-equity-without-working-on-relationships/>



Mount Tabor AME Church in Mount Holly Springs.

and several other towns—is actually the largest, most spread out of the three Heart & Soul pilot sites. According to 2019 Census population estimates, Cumberland County is 88% White, 4.8% Asian, 4.7% African American, 4.3% Hispanic or Latino, and 2.5% American Indian, Pacific Islander, and two or more races.

Even as population growth brings increased vitality and diversity, Greater Carlisle's residents are grappling with a shortage of affordable housing, tensions between new arrivals and long-term residents, and a winnowing away of historical narrative which binds many in this town together.

Heart & Soul Greater Carlisle was launched amid these shifting tides to lift up the social, economic, and environmental assets of the region and create a sustainable future for all residents. Designed to turn traditional community planning upside down, Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul intentionally and positively disrupted the power structures traditionally in control of planning and economic development by:

- engaging community members in storytelling and story gathering;
- assessing residents' relationships with town institutions and government; and
- surfacing how the community's past and present might inform its future.

Story gathering helped to capture Greater Carlisle at this important moment in time: "People don't always recognize that their stories are part of a much larger narrative," said Ashley Perzyna, a former member of the Heart and Soul leadership committee. "H&S spoke



The local community rallied together to help preserve the Mount Tabor AME Church and cemetery.

to the changing environment, the pulse of the community at that moment, identifying the aspects that need to be preserved [but also] capturing the cultural benefits of new communities, like Bosnians and Vietnamese immigrants. *Heart and Soul peeled back the layers and made them visible.*"

One significant outcome of story-gathering is the planned renovation of the Mt. Tabor Church, built in 1870 in Mt. Holly Springs and a hub of African-American residents' sense of community and belonging. "H&S learned about the church ... by actually paying attention," noted participant Carmen James, who grew up in the church. "There has been a trust issue, with sharing stories. [Until now,] the stories that have mattered were white stories."

Just the act of asking Greater Carlisle residents from all walks of life—many of whom have never been consulted—about what the community means to them initiated a process of disrupting traditional power dynamics. By emphasizing greater inclusivity and equity, "[t]he fundamental mission [of Heart and Soul] is reaching unheard voices,"

"I've been around a lot of public meetings: people don't come out unless they are mad about something. What impressed me about the meeting in Carlisle, people were there and nothing was wrong—a lot of people there, and it was really kind of a block party, there was a dinner in a church, and everyone was getting to know each other. There was a different kind of feel."

–Funder/Partner

suggested Dr. Varner, project coordinator and director of outreach at the Cumberland County Historical Society. "Decentralizing power is "the point."

Some of the least heard voices in Greater Carlisle—and arguably in this country—are those of young African Americans. Safronia Perry, the executive director of local nonprofit, Hope Station, came up with an idea to ensure those voices were not just heard, but elevated. Hope Station is a community-based nonprofit creating opportunities for advancement of Carlisle residents through education, job development, and transformational leadership. The organization



Safronia Perry, Executive Director of Hope Station

serves many school-age kids, including teenagers looking for opportunities to learn and lead in their community.

Ms. Perry connected the dots and saw an opportunity, in her words, “to flip the script” —from the traditional narrative of young, black teens in need of services to young, engaged citizens, idea generators, and trusted story gatherers. “The humanities [can help us] reconcile the past ... and give us ways to talk about and process difference, to process trauma,” she said.

A cohort of Hope Station youth was trained by H&S project coordinator Dr. Varner and a Dickinson College professor to interview Greater Carlisle residents, including other students, for their stories. They heard not just positive stories but experiences with racism and bullying in the schools. At a Heart & Soul summit, the young people shared about what they had heard and even experienced themselves. Because community residents, not just established leaders, heard these stories, the young people’s experience moved from hidden to visible.

“This involvement empowered the students to lead the conversation ... We [students and adults] really had to sell the process to the school board and administrators because it changed the original approach from video testimony and a ‘welcoming community’ conversation,” shared Ms. Perry. The people and structures usually controlling the message about students’ experiences— administrators and school board members— ultimately ceded some of that power to advance student leadership as essential to address bullying.

Tatum, a student leader while a senior in high school, launched the Carlisle Youth Council to formalize and sustain this leadership, and as a channel of information and perspective on school issues. An entirely student-run body, the Youth Council has been asked to speak about bullying at school board meetings, a traditional locus of power and visibility. With this invitation, the students’ messages reached a borough president.

The gathering of Greater Carlisle residents’ stories has uncovered connections and shared values, making visible community assets like the empowered students and the Mt. Tabor Church as well as opportunities for healing, like the experiences of people of color, from the Carlisle Indian Industrial School to the destruction of the African-American Lincoln Cemetery in Carlisle (now a memorial and park).



Safronia Perry, Hope Station
in Carlisle

"Some people are ready for the stories, like Lincoln Cemetery. Some people from Carlisle do not want to talk about it," noted Ms. Perry.



Harriet Gumby (left) at the site of Mount Tabor AME Zion Church Cemetery. Her grandfather, a formerly enslaved person, built the church in the late 19th century.

Disruptions like these—even when positively framed and within a context of shared values—can make us uncomfortable. Heart & Soul storytelling and story sharing happen within a *transforming* space, where footholds become unsure. Nevertheless, the stories and momentum have created new avenues for shared understanding and a more inclusive vision and leadership for Greater Carlisle. Through storytelling and resulting empathy, humanities-driven community engagement is the first step toward reconciling power.

4. Understand *all* the resources needed for humanities-driven community change while providing more flexible financial support.

Why? When those who provide financial resources (funders) and those who receive financial resources (grantees) are valued only for the role they play in this financial transaction, Heart & Soul misses an essential opportunity to grow its understanding of what it takes to achieve humanities-driven, people-centered community engagement. Unfortunately, much philanthropic practice reinforces the most limiting notions of funder and grantee. Starting with shared values and shared goals can help focus all parties on a vision that will, as we've described

throughout this report, take much more than financial investment to achieve. When *all* parties see and value the myriad of resources being deployed toward a shared vision, the 'have/have-not' dynamic between funders and grantees can be disrupted. Focusing on community assets, as PHC's pilot communities were urged to do, is an essential first step. As PHC learned, a funder's humility and flexibility can signal a willingness to disrupt this power dynamic. As communities learned to describe the diverse resources and skills they needed, PHC learned to adjust funding requirements, reporting, and especially technical assistance and coaching in ways that responded to communities' needs.

Metrics and reports have their place. Accountability is important. Truly appreciating *all* the resources and the *humanity* being deployed in Heart & Soul communities helped to bring the role of financial resources into perspective. For the communities and PHC, *relationships* defined not by financial role, but by flexibility, appreciation for the time required for meaningful community change, and candor proved a higher aspiration *and* more effective practice.

WILLIAMSPORT'S STORY

Re-defining Resources for Humanities-driven Community Change in Williamsport, PA

"The Heart of Williamsport Community Values are on the desk of every city council member. There's a huge poster of values on the wall of the City Council. The City Council commended Heart of Williamsport for the work, saying, with these values, the Council can do more than put out fires. Now they know what the people value, and values can guide all of the council's decision making." Heart of Williamsport Volunteer

When Williamsport's City Council formally adopted the values articulated by residents through the Heart of Williamsport project, it was the culmination of diverse resources aligned around a single goal: people-centered, humanities-driven community change.

Located about 130 miles north of Philadelphia, the City of Williamsport, PA, is the county seat of Lycoming County and home to the Little League World Series. In 2018, Williamsport had 28,000 residents: 84% white, 13% Black, and about 3% Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino or two or more races. Before the Civil War, Williamsport was a prominent station along the Underground



Screening of *From the Heart of Williamsport*, a storytelling film project created by Williamsport's Community Heart & Soul team.

Railroad, with Daniel Hughes and other residents supporting the travel of enslaved people into Canada and freedom. Throughout the 19th century, Williamsport earned the title of “Lumber Capital of the World” because of its central location, proximity to forestland and rivers, and its entrepreneurial residents. The past stays present in Williamsport sites including Freedom Road Cemetery, neighborhoods like “Millionaire’s Row,” as well as the city’s high school mascot, the Millionaires. Like much of the northeast in recent decades, Williamsport has seen the decline of its natural resource-based economy. Today, the city’s largest industries focus on health care, small-scale manufacturing, and retail.

Launched in 2016 as a pilot community of PHC Community Heart & Soul, the Heart of Williamsport project and its fiscal sponsor, Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, illustrate *all* the community resources needed to achieve people-centered community change. Philanthropy itself would benefit from a much more expansive understanding of community assets and resources—one which includes but goes well beyond dollars and cents.

Heart of Williamsport asked diverse groups of residents to identify what *they* valued most about the community. Project volunteers, all residents themselves, asked: *what do we love about Williamsport, and how can we keep what we love for the next generation, and how can we change what we don’t?* Wrapped around the model and the grant dollars, were inclusive community organizing and discrete community-identified projects. Along the way, technical assistance helped with resident interviewing, resident training, research and data analysis, and links to state agencies and other Heart & Soul communities. All led toward more inclusive problem-solving and opportunities for community celebration.

For economically distressed neighborhoods, this more expansive definition saw residents themselves as perhaps the most valuable asset. As Community Heart & Soul suggests, “your town can reflect the people who live there—building trust, inspiring action, igniting economic development, and making better decisions together.” Nowhere is this shift in understanding more evident than in the Park Avenue Neighborhood of Williamsport. Here residents identified a range of community assets as they developed the *2019 Park Avenue Plan—A Strategic Approach for Stabilization*. Heart of Williamsport’s assets-focused stamp is seen throughout both the 2007 and 2019 plans,



Mosaic artist Dai En (left) at the Lady of Light mosaic pillars in Williamsport. The pillars were inspired by the stories and physical artifacts of local residents.

specifically in this *resident-articulated* list of community resources. Examples included diversity, sense of history, good neighbors, green space, and proximity to colleges.

This focus on assets and subsequent re-defining of *resources* for thriving communities represented a significant shift, explicitly compared to previous planning efforts:

Unfortunately, many of the ideas and objectives from the 2007 plan were largely unsuccessful and did not reach implementation. Committee members that were involved in that process agree that the reason the 2007 plan did not move forward was due in large part to the lack of people willing or able to see it through to implementation. It simply lacked champions. So, what is different about this plan? The steering committee for this [Heart of Williamsport] plan prioritized the establishment of a coalition of community leaders and stakeholders to pursue implementation and ensure that efforts to stabilize and revitalize Park Avenue are not forgotten. The City ... and other local stakeholders all are committed to playing a role in implementation.

By empowering a coalition of community leaders, not only “*the City*,” the 2019 Heart & Soul process launched both a plan and the buy-in, credibility, and relationships needed for implementation.

Another Heart of Williamsport-inspired and -supported effort, the Second Street Community Garden Project, aligned residents of different races and ages beside stakeholders from diverse organizations. Together, they identified the desire for a community garden and, together, they built it:

“Heart of Williamsport built relationships with people I wouldn’t have known otherwise. The project is what gets you together, but community development is about relationships, not about the single project. Sweating together on the community garden allowed me—a white guy—to develop a relationship with Black pastors. In a racially- and economically-segregated city, this process shows us the commonality, which is that we all care about a stronger city.” Heart of Williamsport Volunteer

Second Street community leaders like Star Poole, who was a Heart of Williamsport volunteer, emerged during this asset-focused inquiry.



Children help with planting at the 2nd Street Garden in Williamsport.

As a single parent and a renter, her *decision* to run for school board as much as her successful campaign demonstrated how focusing on resident-engagement priorities opens space for new leaders—in their own and others' minds. One of Ms. Poole's fellow volunteers captured the larger implications of Ms. Poole's leadership:

"You can't go into this process with a single goal. Star's emergence as a leader tells you a little about Star, but what this process tells me is that there are hundreds of residents like Star Poole, who are ready and able to step into leadership. And we've been missing these voices. The [approach] and values we identified were inclusive—that's how Williamsport found Star and Star found Williamsport."
Heart of Williamsport Volunteer

Any discussion of the *people* mobilized by Heart & Soul must also note the Herculean efforts of the Heart of Williamsport project coordinator. While project coordinators represent perhaps the most significant financial investment in Heart & Soul, it's easy to see how Ms. Trowbridge's passion for the city, credibility in diverse settings,



Star Poole, Heart of Williamsport volunteer, holds a copy of the Williamsport Sun-Gazette with a front page story on their recent Community Heart & Soul summit.

and hard-core project management skills were greater than the sum of her paychecks. Moreover, Heart of Williamsport benefited from the unique collaboration of Ms. Trowbridge and Mary Woods, who served as a volunteer and, for a time, assistant project coordinator. Noted frequently as the "heart of Heart of Williamsport," Ms. Trowbridge's and Ms. Woods' complementary skills and personalities inspired and sustained Heart of Williamsport:

“Expectations!! People get this feeling that nothing is going to change ... expect[ing] things to change really quickly and that can be a downfall. Being impatient can be such a barrier to letting the journey happen organically while still moving things forward. Alice and Mary were so great with this. They would smile, be patient, emit positive-change vibes that helped people feel like change was possible.” Heart of Williamsport Volunteer

Patience and positivity, too, proved a valuable leadership resource. Heart of Williamsport, like all community change efforts, faced skepticism and resistance, an unsurprising result of previous experiences with less inclusive efforts. It required non-financial resources to navigate and begin to overcome barriers:

“[Heart of Williamsport] held an AmeriCorps meeting where the young, Black members were very tough on Mary when she was speaking—they thought she was speaking down to them as a White lady. So as a Black woman, with relationships with the group, I was able to ask them how they were going into the meeting, with what mindset? Things changed then and they were totally open.” Heart of Williamsport Volunteer

This volunteer negotiated the space between and among the AmeriCorps volunteers and Heart of Williamsport's coordinators. Individuals from historically privileged communities showed an ability to share, hear, and respond to criticism. In this case, and more often in diverse communities, this is an investment in deeper connection and acknowledging harm. Both are essential to inclusive community change. Neither are financial.

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