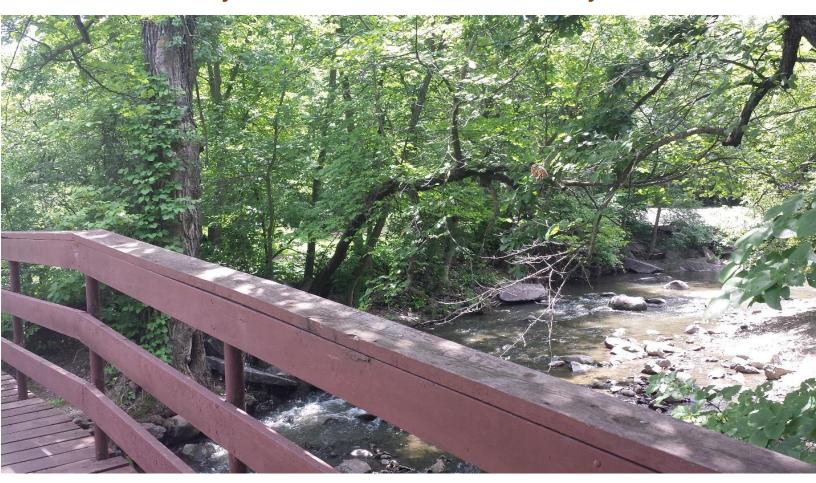# Community Vibrancy and the Greater Redwood Falls Area

A Case Study of a Rural Minnesota Community

A report prepared for Blandin Foundation

By The Improve Group

November, 2015

The **Improve** Group

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Acknowledgements

About Blandin Foundation

Located in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, Blandin Foundation is one of only a handful of foundations in the U.S. focused exclusively on rural communities and the largest rural-based private foundation in Minnesota. The Foundation seeks and supports vibrant rural Minnesota communities, especially the Grand Rapids and Itasca County areas.

About The Improve Group

The Improve Group conducts rigorous studies to help organizations make the most of information, navigate complexity, and ensure their investments of time and money lead to meaningful, sustained impact. The Improve Group is based in St. Paul, Minnesota, and provides research, evaluation, and strategic planning services to organizations locally, nationwide, and internationally.

Introduction

Project Background, Purpose, and Goals

Blandin Foundation contracted with The Improve Group in winter 2015 to conduct case studies of two rural Minnesota communities. Blandin Foundation wanted to learn how they could be the best possible partner for communities in rural Minnesota, and to increase their intentionality in how they interact with communities. Blandin Foundation's inquiry regarding its role in communities centered on the question of how they could best layer their investments in communities in a coordinated fashion in order to optimize community impact. Blandin Foundation staff were also particularly interested in learning about community vibrancy: what makes rural communities (having populations under 35,000) healthy, resilient, and vibrant? To answer these questions, and to gain a deeper understanding of how to foster community change and vitality, Blandin Foundation decided to focus their inquiry specifically on communities, rather than individual programs.

Blandin staff chose to approach this learning through case studies, and made this choice with an understanding of what a case study provides, and what it does not. Blandin staff knew that case studies of individual communities would allow for depth of understanding of a specific community within its broader context. Case studies can serve as a window into a community through the viewpoint of people telling their own stories. In this way, case studies give insight into the study's questions *through* the stories of the community. Case studies are excellent for addressing complexity, providing holistic and contextual examination, allow for a personal, emotional way of increasing understanding, and can illuminate questions that can be applied to exploring other cases. Over time, if Blandin Foundation conducts similar case studies of additional communities, Blandin staff can begin to examine patterns, trends, commonalities, and differences among and between communities.

At the same time, there are some things that a case study will not provide. A case study does not aim to answer all possible questions. For example, this case study is not intended to quantify impact to the community from Blandin Foundation support, nor to present other quantitative data. This case study will provide qualitative information, and if desired, can be combined with quantitative information from other sources in order to answer specific questions. An inherent characteristic of the case study as a methodological approach is that it focuses on a particular experience within a particular context; it is not intended to produce research results generalizable to other contexts. The appropriateness of generalization of specific findings to other contexts will vary depending on the degree to which the research finding is determined by the context in which it was studied. Therefore, we recommend that results from this study be used to guide inquiry into other rural Minnesota communities, further inquiry into the Redwood Falls area, and may be used in comparisons and contrasts, but that generalizations of research findings between communities be made only with careful consideration of context.

Evaluation Questions

Blandin Foundation's specific goals included learning from the following primary evaluation questions:

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What is needed to make change happen in the community?

Through this question, Blandin staff are hoping to learn what, broadly speaking, community members need in order to make positive change in their communities—to create a vibrant and healthy community. These needs may be monetary or non-monetary, and may include factors such as grants, trainings, equipment or facilities, infrastructure, connections or networks, and even specific types of motivating factors. This question is also intended to explore what motivates people to make change in their community, and what barriers they face to making change.

How has Blandin Foundation affected and not affected change in the community?

This question is aimed at illuminating how the Foundation's various investments—whether leadership training, grant making, or components of the broadband program—interact with one another to make change.[1] The question also includes space for exploring how and why any Blandin-funded projects failed to reach their goals. Blandin staff also hope to learn how community members perceive Blandin's place in the community and role in change-making through this question.

To what extent has Blandin Foundation seen, understood, and responded to community priorities?

Through this question, Blandin staff hope to learn how community members feel about Blandin's understanding of and response to community priorities, and if they have any wishes for Blandin to respond to community priorities differently in the future.

How do Blandin Foundation resources interact with other factors that influence and drive community change, such as other resources and work occurring?

This question is intended to highlight the non-Blandin resources that affect change in the community, and investigate how non-Blandin and Blandin resources and support intersect in change-making.

How do networks form and sustain themselves?

Blandin staff hope to learn through this question whether Blandin's leadership program, Blandin grants, and/or any other Blandin-supported activities have impacted the ability of networks to create change in the community. Related sub-questions are intended to illuminate how networks affect change, what increases and decreases influential power of networks, and whether networks—as the sum of parts—are more influential in making change than individual actors.

Have different funding levels led to different results (e.g., have higher funding levels necessarily made more impact)?

With this question, Blandin staff would like to learn what types of outcomes have been generated from different size grants, and whether larger grants necessarily make more impact than smaller grants. In a related vein, staff hope to learn what non-monetary factors are combined with grants in order to create impact. For example, how did leadership or other training or convening affect community projects receiving grants? What non-monetary factors,

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[1] The Blandin Community Broadband Program is comprised of various types of supports and activities, including convening, information support, technical assistance, and grants.

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like networking, can make a small grant more effective? What types of factors, monetary or non-monetary, lead to the greatest impact in the community?

What change would the community like to see in the future?
Through this question, Blandin staff hope to learn what people hope their community will be like in the future, and specifically, what they feel they need in order to create that change.

Selecting Redwood Falls

Blandin Foundation determined that they would do two case studies, with the first to be selected from the numerous rural communities that the foundation has worked in, and the second to be focused on Grand Rapids, as the primary giving area per its charter. Blandin Foundation staff members worked together to choose the Redwood Falls area community for the first case study due to the Foundation's long history of providing three types of support in the area: grants, leadership programs, and broadband support, starting with granting beginning in 1989. Another factor leading Blandin staff to select Redwood Falls was the "breadth and versatility" of the relationship between Redwood Falls and Blandin Foundation over the years.

In the cases of both Redwood Falls and Grand Rapids, Blandin staff debated how to define the unit of analysis of the case studies: the cities themselves bounded geographically by city limits, or the cities inclusive of surrounding communities. In terms of the Redwood Falls study, this question was answered through the process of conducting the case study, in that the community members informing the case study themselves defined their community in a very fluid way with porous boundaries. Thus, the Redwood Falls area case study centers on the stories of people working and/or living in the greater Redwood Falls area, with a strong emphasis on the numerous physical and virtual connections to other geographic locales, near and far.

As a case study, this report addresses the project's evaluation questions by painting a picture of the greater Redwood Falls area through telling the stories community members shared; individual respondents shared their own lived experience and information about the community improvement projects with which they are most familiar. Through our analysis, we have selected those parts of the community stories which most directly answer the evaluation questions that this study seeks to address. Thus, the structure of this report alternates between a storytelling approach focusing on specific community improvement projects and analysis that uses the community's story to answer the questions that Blandin Foundation established to guide this inquiry. Points that address evaluation questions are highlighted in colored text, and key findings across stories are highlighted in text boxes.

In this report, Part 1: Assets of the Greater Redwood Falls Area describes many of the projects and amenities that community members are most proud of, as well as the factors that made these projects possible. In Part 2: Challenges Facing the Community, prominent challenges of the community are discussed, along with efforts that community members are making to mitigate them. Part 3: What it Takes to Create Community Vibrancy explores the dreams that community members described for the future of the Redwood Falls area, and what they will need to make these dreams a reality.

Methodology

The planning for this study was carried out with participation from Blandin Foundation staff, who developed the evaluation questions, provided initial contacts in the Redwood Falls community, and gave significant input into data collection protocol design. Redwood Falls area community members also participated in study design, through providing input into evaluation questions and recommending participants who are active in community work and knowledgeable about the area. As is common for qualitative case studies, we used purposeful sampling for this project. Since the study's goal was to address the evaluation questions through gathering and analyzing in-depth information on the community as reported through community members' life experiences, we specifically sought out individuals from the community who would be able to provide the needed information and perspectives. Because we did not know who would be able to provide this information at the outset of the study, we used snowball sampling: individuals were recommended to us through multiple stages of referrals by Blandin Foundation and community leaders, and we invited those recommended individuals to participate in the study.

We collected data through telephone interviews ranging in length from 30 minutes to two hours, and through two 90-minute, in-person focus groups held in Redwood Falls. One focus group included Blandin leadership program alumni, and the other was with community members having varying levels of familiarity with Blandin Foundation. We did not collect demographic information, such as race or ethnicity, from respondents. However, the topic of age emerged through data collection as a part of the study, and respondents ranged in age from mid-20s to near-retirement or post-retirement age.

We used Excel to code interview and focus group notes by evaluation questions and emerging themes. After coding, we analyzed the data by selecting segments of community stories that best answered the questions set forth by the study, and discussing important issues within and across the selected segments.

An initial draft of the report findings was presented to community leaders who helped to recommend and recruit participants into the study. After review, it was determined that the original sample of interviewees lacked a desired diversity in opinions and participant. This resulted in three additional interviews to provide a perspective from the area's Native American community. Additional interviews followed the same question protocol as those conducted to inform the draft report. Table 1 includes the number of community members who participated in the study, including interviewees who participated in the second round of interviews.

Table 1. Case Study Participants by Method

Method	Participants
Interviews	15
Blandin Leadership Alumni Focus Group	8
Community Member Focus Group	9
Total	**29**

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In terms of the case study unit of analysis, we introduced the project to community members as "learning about Redwood Falls." However, community members described their experience of Redwood Falls as being based in multi- and inter-community interactions and relationships, including 26 neighboring towns, two Native American Reservations, neighboring counties, and regional and international business. Therefore, the unit of analysis for this case study includes not only the city of Redwood Falls, but is defined by the many interrelationships between multiple geographic locales, as facilitated by both physical (driving) and technological (internet, phone, etc.) connections. An expanded methodology is presented in Appendix A.

Context of the Study

Redwood Falls is a city of approximately 5,100 people and is the county seat of Redwood County, in Southwest Minnesota.[2] Founded in 1864, the city is approximately a two hour drive from two large metropolitan areas: the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area to the northeast, and Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to the southwest. The Minnesota River serves as the border between Redwood County and its northern neighbor, Renville County. Both counties have collaborated in community improvement projects over recent years. The two counties are comprised of 26 individual communities, and the area is also home to the Lower Sioux and Upper Sioux Native American Reservations. The area is largely agricultural, and includes the natural beauty of the Minnesota River Valley and its river bluffs, and several parks and wildlife management areas.

Blandin Foundation's history in Redwood Falls began in 1989 with a venture capital seed grant to the City of Redwood Falls in the amount of $25,000. Since that time, Blandin has sponsored twelve leadership programs (seven community programs and five reservation community programs), numerous grants, and broadband support to the community. Grants have ranged from $5,000 to $100,000, and have supported projects including the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project, the Sunktanka Native Youth Development Project and Native youth academic support, the D.A.R.E. Program, the Minnesota Valley History Learning Center, and research for a local foods initiative. Broadband support has included grants for a feasibility study for developing broadband infrastructure within Redwood County, as well as an assessment and community planning process to guide the community's ongoing efforts to obtain improved and consistent broadband service. Blandin Foundation is currently receiving grant applications for further broadband efforts in Redwood County.

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[2] The U.S. Census Bureau provides a 2013 estimate of Redwood Falls' population as 5,135. (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/27/2753656.html)

Part 1. Assets of the Greater Redwood Falls Area

Community members in the greater Redwood Falls area with whom we spoke were eager to talk about the many reasons making it a great place to live, and about how people's love for the area motivates them to work to maintain and improve the area's many assets. In Part 1 of the case study, we discuss three general areas of community work being done to improve and maintain the area's assets, and throughout the discussion, we highlight areas in which community members' stories address the project's evaluation questions. First, we discuss a project to create a regional recreation destination along the Minnesota River valley, called the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor Project. Second, we present work being done to establish a set of annual community recreational events, called Celebrate Redwood Falls. Third, we discuss a number of projects that have been or are currently being undertaken to improve the community and make it an even better place to raise a family. At the end of each section, we offer a key findings highlights box, which summarizes how the community's various activities address one of the project's evaluation questions.

The Tatanka Bluffs Corridor Project

The Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project is an initiative shared between Redwood County and Renville County with the goal of developing a vibrant recreational corridor along the Minnesota River Valley, spanning 26 communities in the two-county region.[3] By establishing the river valley as a recreational corridor, the initiative aims to improve the vitality of the region by making the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor a regional tourist destination. One project leader described this goal as eventually reaching a point in which Twin Cities residents will "go down to the Bluffs" in addition to or instead of "going up to the lake." The Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project has five areas of focus: 1) outdoor recreation, 2) economic development, promoting the 26 community, two county area, 3) gaming and casinos, 4) renewable energy, and 5) education and lifelong learning.

Getting Started: Leadership and a Shared Vision

Although a number of outdoor recreation organizations had been working on developing the Bluffs Corridor through an organization called Waukon RIM as early as 1995, the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor was formally established as an organization with a board of directors in 2007.[4] One of the co-founders of the organization explained that there had been multiple efforts to enhance the corridor through projects to add amenities and acquire land for nearly a decade. Then, in 2006, momentum and a clearer vision for the project grew after a cohort of community leaders from the area participated in Blandin Foundation's Community Advantage Leadership Program (CALP).

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[3] http://www.tatankabluffs.com/about-us/communities/
[4] http://www.tatankabluffs.com/about-us/our-history/

Seeing Redwood Falls as relying heavily on surrounding small towns for workforce and commerce, some participants in the 2006 CALP program developed the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project in order to create economic vitality for the greater region, rather than only focusing on Redwood Falls as the county seat. The organization was conceived as a collaborative, multi-county project, with the board comprised of four representatives from each of the two counties. As one co-founder explained:

> [Through] CALP, we learned to look at underutilized resources and to add leadership to create a community economic advantage... Looking at the resources of the Minnesota River Valley, this river that has divided two counties for 150 years, [we think] it can bring us together and be the foundation for a competitive recreation destination.

Multiple respondents linked the establishment of the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project to Blandin's CALP training, and according to the project leader's quote above, **direct learnings about creating community advantages from Blandin leadership training shaped formation of the project.** An interesting area for further inquiry would be to compare work done on the project before and after the CALP alumni spearheaded the work to explore if and how specific gains from the CALP program may have impacted project outcomes.

The Tatanka Bluffs Corridor also received Blandin grant funding, benefiting from both small and large grants. The project used a small, $5,000 quick start grant in 2010 to hire a facilitator to help the group establish priorities and create a work plan. One participant described this quick start grant as a "catalyst needed to get to the next step." In 2011, the project received a $100,000 grant from Blandin. This funding was used to hire the Centers for Changing Landscapes at the University of Minnesota to create eight designs for park improvements, and to work with the Minnesota Conservation Corps to implement two of the designs. Through the Minnesota Conservation Corps, the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project hosted youth workers from the Twin Cities metro area for summer work periods during two summers, and the youth carried out the planned improvements at two Renville County parks, Skalbekken Park and Beaver Falls County Park. The improvements included clearing brush, landscaping, and building a shelter, trails, and fencing.

Within the overall budget of the Tatanka Bluffs project, which has included over $17 million in grants for land acquisition, both Blandin Foundation grants were a small portion of overall funding. **At the same time, organizers recognize the value of all grant sizes and the various contributions that different size grants can make to the initiative**: "Without that $100,000 grant we'd not be where we are today." Project leaders saw different grant sizes as appropriate for different functions within the overall project. Part 3 of this report contains a call-out section titled "Community members see all grant sizes as valuable and impactful," which addresses in more depth respondents' views of how different amounts of funding are appropriate and useful for different project components and stages.

Creating Successes: Physical Improvements, Collaboration, and Cross-Cultural Learning

Park and Bluffs Corridor Improvements
The project's successes that are most immediately apparent and visible to outsiders to the project are the physical improvements to parks and the Bluffs corridor. The initiative worked

with the Minnesota Conservation Corps and the Centers for Changing Landscapes to design and implement specific park improvements – a new event shelter and trails in Skalbekken Park, and a new campfire teaching circle at Beaver Falls County Park, both in Renville County. These improvements benefit the region by making the parks better destinations for events such as weddings and other gatherings, and trail usage.

Land acquisition has been another successful part of the project. When work on the Tatanka Bluffs corridor first began, project participants broke down into sub-committees, some of which spun off into separate nonprofit organizations. One such nonprofit was formed by the land acquisition committee, called the Green Corridor Initiative. This effort has successfully secured funding specifically to purchase land from a variety of sources, including the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, local chapters of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, Pheasants Forever, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The project now includes public access land along a 45 mile corridor, and continues to work to "complete the land bridge" by filling in gaps along the corridor.

The Green Corridor Initiative enjoyed much success in its efforts, and it is just one example of a sub-committee formed by project workers having a particularly strong interest in a given area of the overall Tatanka Bluffs project work. Another example is the Tatanka Arts sub-group, a local artists' group from the two counties, also led by CALP and other Blandin leadership program alumni who chose to form that group based on strong personal interest. **When sub-committees are populated based on strong interest levels of their members, this strong personal interest is likely an additional motivating factor that can be used to fuel further success.**

Collaborations within a "Spatial Community"

Although the Minnesota River Valley has historically been a geologic divider between Redwood and Renville Counties, the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project has become a mutual point of pride that has brought residents of both counties together, bringing shared benefits. In fact, collaboration was described as one of the major successes of the project. In focusing on collaboration and broadening the definition of community, emphasis is placed on *inclusion* rather than separation. In discussing the relative importance of various project successes, one Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project leader placed higher priority on collaboration and expanding the definition of community than on the physical improvements to the park and lands:

> **More important than the physical things that we did was the connection and willingness of Redwood County board members and residents to cross over and allow most of the funding – if not all – to be put into Renville County projects. Not so much of what we physically put in the ground, but the improved mentality that we are one – a region, a 'spatial community.**

Rather than focusing only on Redwood Falls as the Redwood County seat, Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project leaders promote conceptualizing the two county region as a spatial community with 26 neighborhoods, in order to achieve a bigger impact.

A number of project participants are Blandin leadership program alumni from both counties. A founding program leader stated: "From the beginning, project leaders decided to take a two-county approach and drew in Blandin grads from both pools, with the goal to blend Blandin families." **This respondent also links the large number of leadership program alumni**

involved with the Tatanka Bluffs project with the strong collaborative approach, by suggesting that graduates of Blandin leadership programs gain an enhanced understanding of collaboration through the program.

One way in which project leaders were able to leverage this broadening of geographic scope to achieve a bigger impact was through the work conducted by the project's board. With the Tatanka Bluffs board evenly representing both counties, with board members including both chamber directors and both economic development directors, this project has grown beyond Tatanka Bluffs into broader cross-county collaboration. As one leader described, "The two county boards work together now, they passed a license agreement so people can drive ATVs on roads, they're working on the trail system together, and creating a new ATV park." This same project leader lists this collaboration as the largest impact from the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor initiative: **"I'd say the biggest impact is we have people from different communities who would have never talked now are conversing with each other."**

Part of the purpose of defining the community in this expanded form is to create and market the region as a tourist destination. The project's goal is to eventually become "the North Shore of Southwest Minnesota." The Tatanka Bluffs website boasts "Twenty Six Communities, One Destination."[5] **The importance of marketing as a way to draw tourists, residents, and businesses to the region was a theme that emerged throughout our exploration of the community, and was mentioned by people involved in a range of community projects.** Marketing was often proposed as a solution for situations in which there was a well-defined, commonly shared perception of challenges, such as the need for attracting tourists, residents, and businesses, as mentioned above, and it was also suggested for better informing current residents of local opportunities for recreation and meeting people (networking), and to help local businesses, events, and programs.

Youth Learning and Cross-Cultural Connections

Another success of the Tatanka Bluffs initiative was the unintended benefits of providing positive learning experiences for youth and fostering cross-cultural connections between urban youth and greater Redwood Falls area residents.

The project's partnership with the Minnesota Conservation Corps involved bringing teams of teenaged youth from the Twin Cities metro area to the Bluffs area for work periods during two consecutive summers. The youth worked during 8 am to 5 pm shifts, were hosted for recreational activities in the evenings, and camped at Ramsey Park at night. Blandin leadership program alumni took turns hosting the youth for meals and setting up evening activities to expose them to aspects of life in rural Minnesota. Activities included horseback riding, going to the Redwood Falls Aquatic Center, and the Rotary and Lions Clubs provided tickets to the community play. Although not originally planned with the goal of providing cross-cultural education, the evening entertainment activities served that purpose for Conservation Corps youth and greater Redwood Falls area residents alike.

The youth came from a range of backgrounds: two youth had hearing impairments and used sign language, some youth were of Somali heritage, and other youth had never been outside the

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[5] http://www.tatankabluffs.com/

Twin Cities metro area. One evening recreation host whose family raises award-winning sheep described:

> My family hosted them at our livestock farm. Those teenagers, most of whom had never been outside of the metro, now here they're walking around on a farm with livestock. They learned about the facility, the farm… It was not only good for them but also for my family to get a better understanding of people who grew up in other areas, people who have never been on farms before, to grasp that diversity.

This opportunity for Redwood Falls area residents and the metro youth to learn more about one another's experiences and lifestyles was an unanticipated benefit—and an excellent example of inclusion—that came from the intersection of Blandin and non-Blandin resources supporting the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor initiative.

Acknowledging Challenges: Coordinating Efforts and Maintaining Momentum

As it continues to progress, the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project faces a number of challenges. One of the challenges described by a program leader is simply the difficulty in getting 26 communities "moving in the same direction." **The Tatanka Bluffs Corridor initiative addresses this challenge through a combination of *inclusion*—the project's board of directors has equal representation from both Redwood and Renville Counties—and strong leadership achieved through Blandin leadership training.** One leader involved with the Tatanka Bluffs work explained that Blandin leadership training helped her improve her skills in building consensus among people holding fast to different views, and at being a better listener, better relating to individuals with various personality types, and having more confidence in relating to people. She described these skills as having a large positive impact on her community work.

Other challenges described by project participants are encouraging more people to become involved, more evenly distributing workloads, and obtaining more funding to carry out additional stages of the ongoing project. One participant explained that there is currently a 25-year plan in place for the project, which makes engaging the next generation of leaders critically important to ensuring the plan is carried through. A project leader expressed one of the greatest take-aways from the CALP program as the value of coordinating efforts of leadership program alumni, yet **there is a sense that, across the various Tatanka Bluffs related workgroups, "twenty percent of the alumni do eighty percent of the work."**

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One reason for this is seen as a lack of small funding sources for meetings: "We don't have funding set aside to come together without charging people to come, so we engage those who show up and want to be involved." Regular meetings do not happen unless one of the primary leaders sets up a meeting, however, email is used for continual contact within the group. **Tatanka Bluffs Corridor leaders feel that although there are many leadership program alumni currently involved throughout various committees, more impact could be achieved at a faster rate if more alumni were more actively participating.**

Networks in the Redwood Falls Area

Whether speaking about the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project or other initiatives, respondents repeatedly referenced the importance of networks in community work, and the benefits of the expanded network that Blandin leadership program alumni build. One project leader explained that the reason why people from Renville and Redwood Counties were able to work so well together was because many participants from each county had Blandin leadership training, which equipped them with the skills and common understandings needed for effective collaboration. Another respondent discussing the Tatanka Bluffs project's collaboration with the Minnesota Conservation Corps explained that an alumni of the Blandin Leadership Program working on the Tatanka Bluffs project had a connection at the Minnesota Conservation Corps, and was able to learn more about the application process through that connection.

As with the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project, community members working on other projects explained that in many cases, **networks in the area are formed when one or a small group of individuals champion a project and work to get others involved to build momentum, or if there is a type of focusing event that motivates people to take action.** Multiple participants also described how the community tends work together and rally around issues that impact the region's children. As described later in this report, this was how many of the community's most celebrated assets came to fruition, including the Aquatic Center, the Community Center, and Celebrate Redwood Falls, among others. Community members also identified common themes for how networks in the area increase and decrease their influential power. **Networks can increase influence by engaging enough people so that no one individual is overworked and by building momentum through a series of small victories.** Additionally, many of the people who informed this report shared concerns about **networks losing influence by not engaging the younger generation, avoiding succession planning, or becoming too stuck in their ways to adapt to change.**

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Celebrate Redwood Falls

Celebrate Redwood Falls is a series of four annual events, described in Table 2, which are held throughout the calendar year in order to celebrate the Redwood Falls community. As a new initiative, the Fire and Ice Festival has been held only once to date, and all others have had their second annual occurrence.

Table 2. Celebrate Redwood Falls annual events

Event Name	When it is held	Activities include…
Fire and Ice Festival	February	Bonfires, games, hot chocolate and s'mores on Lake Redwood
Night Falls	May	A light show on the 50-foot Ramsey Falls waterfall, hiking to the falls, and Dakota cultural exhibits
Summer Splash	June	Three days of events, such as a pool party at the Aquatic Center, a rubber duck race in the Redwood River, baseball, fireworks, a parade, and a 5K run/walk
Haunted House	October	Two nights of scary fun in a 110 year old downtown hotel basement

These events create opportunities for community members to get to know one another, and provide entertainment. Many of the facilities used to host these events, including the Aquatic Center and Ramsey Falls, are the community's most celebrated amenities, which will be discussed further in this report.

Getting Started: A Motivated Returning Couple

A couple who recently relocated to Redwood Falls, Mark and Susan Anderson founded the nonprofit organization Celebrate Redwood Falls to establish and run the annual events that were first created in order to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Redwood Falls' founding in 1864.[6] Having both grown up in Redwood Falls, moved away for college and returned to the community to resettle after about 25 years, Susan and Mark remembered various parades and events from their childhoods. However, after moving back to Redwood Falls in 2013, they heard a great deal of discussion about how "all the other local towns" had celebrations, but Redwood Falls did not. They heard complaints that there was "nothing to do" in Redwood Falls. **In our discussions with community members, this shortage of "things to do" in Redwood Falls was often cited as a barrier to attracting new, young families and professionals to the area, which was described as important for the community's overall sustainability.**

Shortly after returning to Redwood Falls, Mark and Susan began working with the mayor on a project to help rejuvenate downtown. They asked about the efforts that they saw people making to put together a 150th anniversary celebration for the town's founding and heard that there was no real leader for the efforts. They decided to step in and created the nonprofit

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[6] These names are pseudonyms for the respondents.

organization called Celebrate Redwood Falls to run the annual events and spearhead the project.

Working with Existing Networks and Known Leaders to Build Support

To draw more local support in, Susan and Mark created a large board for the organization, including the city mayor, the police chief, and members of the Redwood County fair board. They also involved the city government and Lower Sioux community as partners on the project, with the local government and Jackpot! Junction Casino and Hotel providing resources and support. The visibility of these sponsors' involvement also lent credibility to the enterprise. With the combination of the high profile board membership and the city government support, Mark and Susan felt they were able to successfully convey the message that the project was, in fact, a group project supported by the broader community.

In addition to using collaboration in order to give legitimacy and credibility to the project, Susan and Mark relied heavily on networking in order to build their connection to the community. Although Mark and Susan had only recently moved back to the Redwood Falls area, Susan's sister had been a Redwood Falls resident for 51 years and had a large network. She joined the Celebrate Redwood Falls board, and used her network to promote the project to the community. "Through her involvement she's offered a huge resource in reaching out to the community. People are still getting to know us now, but initially it was people like her reaching out and getting people on board."

Collaboration and networking gave Celebrate Redwood Falls increased credibility through capitalizing on relationships with well-known community members. This increased support for the Celebrate Redwood Falls project and contributed to the project's many successes in creating positive change for the community as it grew into its second year. When we spoke with Mark and Susan about the networking that board members did to help the project, they described positive project impacts including an increased number of volunteers, yet they also attributed this increase in volunteers to people "seeing what's possible" after a successful event. Further inquiry on this topic could examine if any specific project impacts could be more directly correlated with specific causal factors, such as networking or showing what's possible, as discussed below.

As Susan and Mark build experience in the community, they will be able to increasingly draw upon their own networks, as well as those of others. Susan also recently completed Blandin Community Leadership Program, which, according to respondents who have graduated from the program, **provides alumni with both an extensive network, as well as increased credibility in the community**. One alumni described the leadership program's impact on networking and how alumni are perceived in the community as, **"Blandin is—you say the name and people say 'Oh you went through Blandin.' It's instant credibility.** It was more than ten years ago when I did the program, but there are people from my class who I haven't talked to for six years but I could call them and say hey we were in Blandin together and that's a whole network of people that I have access to – can't have too much of that."

Building Momentum and Success by "Showing People What's Possible"

Mark and Susan suggested that one of the most impactful factors motivating support for community vitalization and improvement projects is "showing people what's possible." They

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feel that increased support for the Celebrate Redwood Falls project came from the community simply seeing an increase in the number of activities and events available and getting excited about what was open to them: "People started jumping behind this because this hasn't been happening on this level before." Several community members echoed these themes when asked about how change happens in the Redwood Falls area. People agreed that change, at times, "takes a trailblazer" and begins when individuals are willing to take a risk. When others see what is possible, they gain motivation and get involved.

In its second year, the Celebrate Redwood Falls project is gaining increasing amounts of community support from individuals, as well as from businesses and local government. Susan and Mark said, "Now in year 2, after [people have] seen it [in the first year], they're lining up to help. It's fun for a small town to have these things." The size of the Night Falls event doubled by the second year, and had fifty volunteers. The city government also provided support for both Night Falls and Summer Splash. The first Halloween event was also very successful: "with very little advance notice and little push we had 600 people come to the haunted house and we had plenty of volunteer monsters." The Halloween theme for the second year was "Bigger and Scarier", which also included an added a less-scary, kid-friendly component. Businesses are also becoming increasingly interested in providing support: "Business sponsors are coming to us and saying I believe in that vision and what you're doing to re-energize and providing fun things, let us sponsor you," reported Susan.

Beyond the Celebrate Redwood Falls initiative, another respondent described a positive attitude as a major factor supporting some of the largest changes that have happened in the community over the last ten to fifteen years. **This active community leader attributes much community success in the greater Redwood Falls area to a "can-do attitude," to being solution oriented and seeing silver linings rather than dwelling on and being paralyzed by problems.** This leader feels this positive attitude is present within the greater community, but also acknowledges that being a Blandin leadership program alumna may be causing her to see things in a particularly positive, optimistic way.

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Making Change in Redwood Falls

As Susan and Mark's story suggests, **a factor of prime importance in creating positive change in this rural community is having broad community support.** Participants described how change is often created when one or a few leaders **"build momentum" or "showing what's possible"; often, this requires an individual or small group to be willing to take a risk before others will get involved.** Tangible outcomes of work or investments can build or keep momentum; as is described later in this report, a group called the Friends of the Park have had successful fundraisers for Ramsey Park by generating excitement through the updates to the park that they have been able to fund. Similarly, the Friends build momentum by using matching funds to leverage and increase contributions.

A final theme that community members discussed when talking about how change happens in Redwood Falls was related to there being a need. As will be described shortly, the Redwood Falls area benefits from a top-of-the-line community center and new aquatic center – both of these improvements came from community members identifying a need. The old public middle school was not functional and needed to be replaced, so leaders used that momentum to create an adjacent community center. Similarly, the old pool was 52 years old, which spurred conversations about whether to fix it or replace it with a new community amenity. **In each of these cases, community members described how working collaboratively and in networks increased impact and improved outcomes.**

Redwood Falls: A Great Place to Raise a Family

Redwood Falls area residents with whom we spoke are extremely proud of the area's many amenities, such as good parks, the aquatic center, and an excellent library. These and other amenities make the area a great place to live and a great place to raise a family. A number of respondents mentioned that having quality amenities and fun things to do is a strategy for drawing new residents—young professionals and families—to the area, which they described as important for supporting a consistent population base into the future.

At the same time, residents emphasize that their goal is not to grow Redwood Falls significantly larger than its current size. The approximately 5,100 resident town provides the small town quality of life that residents appreciate and are trying to market. The idea of appreciating the size of the community, and the desire to sustain that size, came up in each of the two focus groups that informed this study. As one participant put it, "what's wrong with a community of

5,500 people? Nothing wrong with it, we're being successful holding our own. We can't double in size but sustainability has to be a part of it."

As with the Tatanka Bluffs project leaders, other community members we interviewed conceptualized the "area" as geographically broader than the Redwood Falls city limits. Throughout the project, we saw a consistent focus on Redwood Falls as part of a larger community, including Renville County, the Sioux communities, and other local towns and rural areas. This flexible conceptualization of what defines community raises the important issues of community identity and insider-outsider status.

Being a new resident to the area can create the perception of insider-outsider status. Several individuals with whom we spoke who recently moved to the community described being perceived as outsiders. As one focus group participant described, "Coming from outside, intentionally joining the community, it was difficult. Three years in I felt [like] a true part of the community. [Until] people figure out who you are, you are treated differently. "Others with similar experiences agreed, or said they felt like a stranger for the first five years.

However, length of time in the community is not the only determining factors of a sense of belonging and the unequal treatment that people perceive receiving. Individuals from tribal communities also described being perceived as outsiders and being discriminated against due to this perception, which will be discussed further in Part 2 of this report.

Thus, a contradiction exists for the community: community members expressed a desire to draw in new residents, and yet some new residents describe having a variety of negative experiences, including a sense of being unwelcome or discriminated against, or perceiving barriers to successful community participation. The community may choose to explore and address this contradiction as they devote efforts toward attracting new residents to the area.

Prime Asset: The Redwood Area Community Center

One of the assets most frequently mentioned by respondents is the recently built Redwood Area Community Center, which came about as a partnership between the City of Redwood Falls and the Redwood Area Public Schools. One respondent explained, "We have a unique situation with our school and our city—that together they built a community center that they both share, two public entities that both share funds, and both use this facility that they built." This cross-agency collaboration was described as very unusual and very productive.

Key informants explained that the community center – school project arose out of necessity, since the school needed renovation. "The school was too old and not functional, they just had to do something or it would fall apart. It was more of a blessing than curse, because we got a new school," one respondent described. The school had a need for more space in order to hold bigger events and tournaments, so the community center was built adjacent to the Redwood Valley Middle/High School, and the combined facility houses a multi-purpose gymnasium, a civic arena, and a conference center.

Similar to the foundation of the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor initiative, the Redwood Area Community Center project began with individuals who completed Blandin's Community Leadership program together, including the superintendent of the Redwood Area School District and the Redwood Falls city administrator. One respondent pointed out that all of the community meetings held for this Blandin Foundation case study project, the kick-off meeting

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and the focus groups, were held in a building that had connections to Blandin: "This community center that you meet in is an initiative that came from Blandin through the training." **This example illustrates how Blandin and non-Blandin resources intersect, in that leadership program alumni spearheaded and led a project funded by non-Blandin sources. It also provides another example of how Blandin's leadership programs have impacted the community, and how collaborations—in this case between the school system and the city—contributed to positive community change.**

Prime Asset: The Redwood Falls Aquatic Center

Another amenity that respondents described as an asset of Redwood Falls is the relatively new, $3 million aquatic center, which includes multiple water play areas, a diving area, and swimming and lap areas. As a municipal facility, the project involved three years of close collaboration between the city of Redwood Falls and other project leaders. One respondent with knowledge of the aquatic center building project stated that Blandin leadership alumni were specifically sought out to participate on the project committee. Another respondent also commented on the presence of leadership alumni in the project and the skills that they brought to the work, "You can't say that it was a Blandin initiative, but the alumni were there, and they knew how to pull the people together."

Like with the Redwood Area Community Center and the updated school, **necessity was the factor that brought about community change** in the form of the new aquatic center. A respondent explained:

> We had a 52 year old swimming pool. The issue became do we pour tens of thousands of dollars into this pool to fix it, or do we build something different? It was a need to do one or the other.

In both cases, outdated facilities were the motivating factor leading to the work being done. The aquatic center is another example of a project in which **Blandin and non-Blandin resources intersected: leadership program alumni were active in a project funded by other sources.**

Prime Asset: Ramsey Park

People we spoke with are very proud of the 200+ acre Ramsey Park—the largest municipal park in Minnesota—and list it as an important amenity for families and a contributor to general quality of life in the Redwood Falls area. The park, acquired by the city of Redwood Falls in the 1957, includes a free-of-charge zoo, a campground and shelter overlooking the Minnesota River Valley, trails, and two

Figure 2. Donor Bench in Ramsey Park

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water falls.[7] One respondent with knowledge of the park indicated that it requires $400,000 per year for upkeep and improvements. Funding to maintain this park comes from multiple sources. An organization called Friends of the Park holds fundraisers and uses matching funds to leverage and increase contributions: "through legacy funds and the Otto Bremer Foundation, they use money that we got locally and they leverage that through other sources. I think they've made about $800,000 of improvements so far," reported one respondent.

Like with the community center and aquatic center, Blandin leadership alumni are active in working to improve and maintain Ramsey Park. The Ramsey Park project also provides an example of how **different funding amounts can be leveraged**: by combining grants with fundraising events, momentum can be created by using matching funds and raising smaller amounts from more sources in order to build a larger total funding base.

When discussing motivational factors that contribute to general community improvements, one respondent used the example of the Friends of the Park fundraiser as a visible event through which people can see tangible connections between their efforts, their donations, and project outcomes. This respondent explained that through creating small scope projects, it is possible to motivate people by showing concrete positive outcomes, even if small. This is a way to generate excitement and activity:

> **I think the motivation is when they can see where their money is being spent, and outcomes are coming from it.** For example, our Rotary Club has people who give money to the foundation and we apply for grants, so we can get up to $3,000 or $6,000 a year to do improvements in the community. So we've done community benches, plantings downtown, benches along the bike trails, and people will help support something when they see there's a beginning and an end result in a short period of time.

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[7] http://redwoodareacommunitycenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Ramsey-Park-Brochure-2013.pdf

Other Appreciated Assets: Library and Hospital

Other assets that Redwood Falls area residents listed as important to their quality of life and as good attractions for young families and professionals include the recently renovated library. The Redwood Falls library is very popular and has a number of programs, including a lunch-and-learn series and genealogy, and there are plans for an interactive education playground. One respondent described the library as "a huge component of the community…they have twelve computers, there are people in there all the time." Another respondent opined that the quality of the library is what would be expected in a much larger city, "We're 5,400 people and we have the best library that you'd expect in a town that's up to 15,000 people." The local hospital, having a helicopter pad and specialty doctors, was also listed as an important facet of Redwood Falls and a potential draw for new residents, as it will provide excellent jobs as well as services. The hospital recently underwent a renovation in the range of $12 million, and as will be discussed later in this report, is working toward obtaining telemedicine capabilities. With the recent renovations, specialty doctors, a helicopter pad, and possibly telemedicine in the future, this hospital has the potential to have significant positive implications for the community.

Figure 3. Inside the Redwood Falls Public Library

Blandin Foundation investments intersect with one another and with non-Blandin resources

Each of these examples to build, improve, and maintain community assets also illustrates how various Blandin resources intersect with one another and with non-Blandin resources. For instance, layering a start-up grant first, then a larger grant at a later project stage, has created positive outcomes for the Tatanka Bluffs project, illustrating how **both small and large Blandin grants can be used in different ways at different project stages to produce large impacts.**

Similarly, the Ramsey Park project shows how small and large financial contributions can be leveraged to encourage matching funds and obtain contributions of all sizes from individuals as well as foundations. **Intersections of resource types also extend beyond funding into leadership: several projects were (or are) led by Blandin leadership program alumni, but receive some or all funding from non-Blandin sources. Respondents repeatedly indicated the value of having Blandin alumni involved in projects; the positive impact of the Blandin leadership program on the greater community was one of the most frequently discussed elements among respondents.** One community member summed this sentiment by stating, "You can't pin [it all] on what Blandin has done in instilling the leadership qualities through [the leaders], but indirectly I can name people that are in all these activities that went through BCLP."

Summary: Collaboration, Networks, and Leadership are Vital for Success

Across the various projects to build, improve, and maintain both physical and activity-based area assets—the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor, the Celebrate Redwood Falls organization and events, the community center, the aquatic center, and Ramsey Park—**a number of factors were frequently listed by respondents as important for creating and maintaining positive community change and vibrancy**.

- Collaboration among individuals, across organizations, across counties, and across different sectors, was repeatedly described as a foundational aspect of project success. This suggests that **collaboration is one of the most important factors for creating positive community change and vibrancy in the greater Redwood Falls area.**

- **Using networks was also a prime strategy utilized across successful projects in the area.** Community members described using networks in order to make connections, access

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knowledge and resources, relay information, and gain trust and legitimacy. **Leadership program alumni, especially, spoke about the tremendous positive impact that being a BCLP graduate made on their network size and networking abilities. In this way, the leadership program has affected the ability of networks to create change in Redwood Falls.** However, alumni and non-alumni alike described challenges in making and using positive connections between Native and non-Native communities.[8] **An opportunity exists for the greater Redwood Falls area community and/or Blandin Foundation to create a structure to assist networking across Blandin Community Leadership Program and Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program.** Networking has created positive outcomes for the community projects described above; therefore, it may also help to improve relations and collaboration between Native and non-Native communities.

- **Strong leadership was a third component shared across most, if not all, community projects examined in this study.** Blandin leadership program alumni played key roles in the Tatanka Bluffs, Redwood Area Community Center, Redwood Falls Aquatic Center, and Ramsey Park projects.

- Although not mentioned in all projects, **having a positive attitude was mentioned by some respondents as an important and effective tactic contributing to successful project outcomes.** Community members found this tactic effective in regard to the Celebrate Redwood Falls project specifically, as well as across many successful projects creating positive change and vibrancy in the greater Redwood Falls area, more generally.

- Another success-building tactic mentioned in regard to some but not all projects is "showing what's possible." The Celebrate Redwood Falls project, described above, and downtown revitalization efforts, detailed in Part 3 of this case study, illustrate how **"showing what's possible" can build community motivation and contribute to success.** As discussed in relation to the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor above, and the Sunktanka Program in Part 2, **start-up grants, or "seed money," can be a vital resource for getting ideas off the ground, making ideas concrete and visible to others, or in other words, "showing what's possible." In this way, small start-up grants or "seed money" can be linked to building community motivation and project success.**

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[8] The issue of challenging relations between Native and non-Native communities in the greater Redwood Falls area is discussed in depth in Part 2 of this report.

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Part 2. Challenges Facing the Community

Community members frequently identified that there is crossover between the community's efforts to improve amenities and make the area a better place to raise a family, and the challenges they face in making the changes in the community that are needed to draw families to live there. As one focus group participant expressed, "we have to realize, no community can be all things to all people… we will never be able to make every[one] happy all the time."

People we spoke with raised two prominent challenges: relations between towns and Native American Reservations; and attracting new residents in order to keep the area's population size consistent into the future, a challenge impacted by shortages in broadband accessibility, amenities for young adults, housing, and daycare.

Communication and Collaboration between Native and Non-Native Community Members

Discussions with both Native and non-Native respondents elicited mention of negative relations between area Native and non-Native communities. Some respondents described this problem as discrimination, or structural racism, while others characterized the problem in various ways, including there being a disconnect, gap, or separation between the Native and non-Native communities, or a lack of communication and welcoming.

When asked what outcomes they would desire from improved future relationships between Native and non-Native communities, respondents from each community spoke of collaboration and partnership. They described integration of communities and area businesses, and coordination of events, activities, nonprofits, and clubs. There is a desire for more respect and professionalism. One community member described what this would look like to her:

> I would see people from the Redwood Falls area reaching out to members of the Lower Sioux Community and wanting to celebrate with them the contributions and presence of the community itself, with Lower Sioux member reaching back, as well. Collaboration is the brunt of it. It could be more communication. It could be simple, for example, Redwood Falls [community members] recognizing that November is Native American Heritage Month, and asking what they can do to help… celebrate.

Some respondents suggested that progress has been made on these issues, but that there are opportunities for improvement. One interviewee discussed an increased awareness of the Dakota 38 Riders during the annual 330 mile Dakota 38 Memorial Ride through the region. As she described:

> From the initial years it was like 'what the heck are these guys doing' but now businesses have donated to the ride, and non-Native families and congregations have helped support and cook some of the meals in that period. There's been a greater awareness and understanding, a major change.

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One respondent described how tribal leadership has been involved in Celebrate Redwood Falls, which has included financial support from Jackpot! Junction, and cultural programming, demonstrations, and hands-on projects at the Summer Splash to recognize shared history. While she described this as a great example of collaboration, she explained that annual events hosted by the tribe – including two pow wows, one of which celebrates and honors all of the region's veterans – are less well-attended by non-Native community members. As she described:

> There are not a lot of people from Redwood Falls that come to the [pow wows], even though they're open to everyone to witness that it's a part of our culture that's thriving and alive. It's not just something that you read about in school; it's a living heritage, not just history, and we're still a nation here.

Relationships in Schools

Interviewees described the area's public schools as making efforts to bridge the gap between Native and non-Native community members. For example, the Redwood Falls school district and Dakota Wicohan, a local nonprofit and cultural resource center aimed at sustaining and growing the Dakota culture, worked together to create curriculum that is inclusive of Native history to be used in the schools. Another interviewee described being particularly proud of work that has been done between the Tribal Council and the Redwood Falls school board in the form of ongoing collaboration to address challenges in the school. Another still described positive steps that the school has made to celebrate and recognize Native American Heritage Month, which have included having Billy Mills (the second Native American ever to win an Olympic gold medal) speak to students about perseverance, and setting up teepees to celebrate the month. As she described:

> I have former students come back and say they feel that when they were in school there never would have been a teepee in front of the school. In the past few years to celebrate [Native American Heritage Month] we have been putting [teepees] up to celebrate the month, one in front of the Middle and High School, and one in front of the elementary school. All students take part in painting it.

As with many of the progress and changes that Redwood Falls community members described in their communities, **study participants explained that the progress made in the schools frequently resulted from people identifying a need.** In the case of the schools, participants attributed the progress that has been made as reactions to youth suicides, a low Native graduation rate (which has since increased to much higher than the state average), and a general prioritization of the well-being of the community's children. As one respondent put it, "I would say the youth, the children [motivate change]. When things are affecting them, people sit up and take notice."

Although progress has been made, interviewees explained that bullying, discrimination, and racism continues to be challenges within the school district, and that opportunities to include Minnesota history from the Native perspective in school curriculum still exist.

The Role of Blandin Foundation

Outside of the schools, Blandin Foundation has also contributed to progress in this area through the Nine Dimensions of Healthy Community, a framework created by Blandin Foundation that

outlines the separate but inter-related dimensions of community health. One dimension that is discussed in both BCLP and BRCLP is that of inclusion. Here leaders are urged to consistently make the effort required to capitalize on the range of differences in the community and intentionally seek ways to utilize the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and skills of everyone for the benefit of the whole community. Healthy communities are discussed as ones in which the value and benefit of including diverse voices and perspectives is recognized and actively sought.

While study participants had overwhelmingly positive feedback about their experiences with the leadership program, a couple BRCLP alumni described how having BCLP and BRCLP as separate programs can potentially take away from some of the benefits of going through the leadership training in the Redwood Falls area. Nearly all leadership alumni expressed the appreciation for the networking benefits that being a Blandin Alumni has brought to their community work, which last long after going through the program. However, a few study participants explained that having members from the Native communities attend separately from their neighbors may take away from opportunities to collaborate and network. As one participant explained:

> I definitely believe having a separate program for reservation negatively impacts the ability to network and communicate with other alum. It was fabulous to have networking through Native communities and reservations throughout the state, and amazing to have those resources, but working together as neighbors side by side would be just as beneficial – if not more – to have the communities working together and networking.

Dakota Wicohan: Providing Local Leadership

When discussing the progress that has been made, and the opportunities for improvement and increased collaboration and understanding, several community members pointed out the work that has been done by the local nonprofit organization Dakota Wicohan. Dakota Wicohan was established in 2001 as the only organization in the state dedicated to revitalizing the Dakota language and way of life. As a part of Dakota Wicohan's mission, the organization works to provide outreach and education in the community. Interviewees explained that Dakota Wicohan has been "instrumental" in doing work related to youth suicides among Native students, working to combat racism in rural schools through culturally-based education, and changing curriculum at the district level to include cross-cultural understanding and the Native history. **One respondent suggests that Dakota Wicohan could offer activities that would specifically serve as a cultural bridge between Native and non-Native communities in order to build better relations**:

> The potential is high for [Dakota Wicohan] to be a bridge builder between Tribal communities and the mainstream community. It creates a safe buffer for people to learn about different cultures, different values, to see a different world view in a safe way.

One suggestion to help solve this problem is to utilize Dakota Wicohan's very successful Sunktanka Program as a bridge between communities.[9] The Sunktanka Program is designed as

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[9] The Sunktanka Wicahyuapi program is one of several leadership programs that Dakota Wicohan offers. We asked study participants to discuss this particular program because it has received grant funding from Blandin Foundation in the past.

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a youth development program using horses to build leadership skills, but Sunktanka has also engaged in special non-program activities, including parades, the 4H program, and trail rides with cultural interpretation.

The Sunktanka Program has achieved a high level of success with limited resources, and could be equally successful at contributing to improved inter-community relations. **Dakota Wicohan has expressed interest in serving as a bridge-builder between the Native and non-Native communities.**

The Sunktanka Native Youth Leadership Program: Part of the Solution
The Sunktanka Youth Leadership Program, developed in 2002 to help Native youth learn conflict resolution and leadership skills, is an example of a successful program designed to address negative Native/non-Native relations. The program was originally created in order to address girl-to-girl bullying in the schools, and has, over time, evolved into using horses to teach Dakota language, tradition, and responsibility. The Sunktanka Program helps Native youth cope with the problems of discrimination and structural racism: by teaching leadership skills and heritage-based content to Native youth, they become more empowered in addressing challenges. The program's website describes the program and its impact as, "The wide array of horse-based, cultural and academic enrichment activities have allowed youth to recognize the challenges they face, their own potential and identify their own strategies for future success."[10]

In 2008 and 2010, the Sunktanka Youth Leadership Program applied for and received funding from Blandin Foundation to match other funding sources and to bolster curriculum development and youth leadership programming. Regarding their decision to apply for Blandin funding, one program leader explained, "It was a good fit. I'm a Blandin alum, knew Blandin does leadership development and we do leadership development in our program, in a rural reservation community."

Successes from the Sunktanka Native Youth Leadership Program
The Sunktanka Program has enjoyed many successes. The program has grown in the thirteen years since it was started: it now has nonprofit status, and at least three of the young women who first went through the program are now serving as program leaders. One respondent said, "That's leadership development – the original founders are getting older, they are wearing out, so there is someone to take over." Most of the youth who have gone through the program have graduated from high school, and most of those graduates have gone on to enrolling in higher education. The college successes of the girls who graduated from the program are seen as an indicator of the leadership capabilities they have developed. Among the girls who graduated from the program who are currently in college, one is pursuing Dakota language as a teacher, another is pursuing formal equine management, and another is studying pre-medicine. Program graduates are often asked to do speaking presentations at various events, and the program is seen as a model for Native and Tribal communities and called upon to do program demonstrations.

Dakota Wicohan also provides a lacrosse program for boys, which has had large positive impacts on health, culture, and mentoring. One respondent described the ripple effects of programming for the boys as "huge – a systemic change on our youth." The combination of

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[10] http://sunktanka.weebly.com/

different program elements for both girls and boys has had a large positive impact on the Native community.

Challenges facing the Sunktanka Native Youth Leadership Program
The Sunktanka Program also faces numerous challenges. Although youth graduates of the program have experienced significant benefits, the original problem that fueled the creation of the program—school bullying—still persists. The youth suicide rate for the community is high, and although the Sunktanka Program is making a positive difference, the magnitude of the problem is such that the community is still seeking further solutions to improve outlooks for youth. One respondent articulated a need for help in looking for solutions and other program models to deal with these larger challenges. "If there are viable models in a small community, maybe there's some capacity building that Blandin can help fund and support – to look for promising models, showing effectiveness."

Another challenge for the Sunktanka Program is in the area of funding and other resources. The program has received some Blandin grant funding, but overall, has a difficult time raising sufficient funding and is hoping to become less reliant on soft grant money in the future. **As the program has found challenges in obtaining sufficient funding, program leaders have learned to leverage resources through using in-kind support, volunteer labor, and matching funds.** The program uses in-kind support in that the horses, land, and building used for the program are all provided for the program's use by an individual in the community. Volunteer time is also a significant resource used: the program leaders are all volunteers, and parent volunteers are used extensively for office work, programming work, and even presenting on the program at a regional art summit. The program also leverages AmeriCorps funds for youth programming through using matching funds to raise more financial support.

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Responding to Community Priorities

The Blandin Foundation works with rural communities across the state of Minnesota. In the meetings that informed the scope of this project, Blandin staff members consistently emphasized that a key element of their strategy working with communities is to respond to a community's unique and individual needs. This was illustrated in a phrase that fueled their decision to pursue case studies: "when you've seen one rural community, you've seen *one* rural community."

As mentioned previously, the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program was brought up by a project participant as an exceptional example of Blandin heeding the specific needs of a community. Like many of the projects discussed in this report, one of the Sunktanka Program leaders was a Blandin leadership alumni, having gone through the first cohort of the BRCLP. She recognized that content related to specific challenging factors, including internalized oppression and discrimination, were missing from the program's curriculum. After voicing this concern to Blandin, the foundation worked with her and other advisors to adapt the training to reflect the oppression and discrimination issues, meeting her needs and, ultimately, making the program stronger.

Blandin works to equip community members with the leadership skills that they can apply to create vitality in their own communities, and supports these efforts with grant money. **Overall, project leaders conveyed that the Blandin Foundation had been very responsive to community needs.** One leader expressed gratitude for the number of individuals being put through the Blandin leadership program: "A big thank you for sending new waves of Blandin-trained graduates back – it makes a difference, to have that new wave of leaders, new human resources are always vital." Another leader appreciated Blandin's receptiveness to the grant requests for the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project, and connected that receptiveness to the number of leadership program alumni working on the project: "Blandin was well aware of us when we put in an application for the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor project [because] they knew there was a strong core of leaders here to work on the project and see it through."

As another idea for future work, **informants expressed a desire to have more regular, ongoing opportunities for Blandin leadership alumni to network and keep in contact, especially across cohorts.** This is an example of a community desire that, while not the direct responsibility of the Blandin Foundation, can be an opportunity for future efforts. **An opportunity also exists to include BLCP and BRLCP alumni together in potential future collaborations.** The Redwood Falls BLCP draws from Redwood falls and neighboring communities, but the BRLCP remains separate; while one BLCP alumni expressed that going through the leadership program provided him with an "instant network" of people he can collaborate with, the BRLCP program has fewer participants, and, therefore a less robust pool of individuals from which to draw. Efforts to network across programs will help to reduce barriers between the two community leadership programs and provide mutual benefits.

Keeping the Redwood Falls Area Population Size Consistent into the Future

As discussed previously in this report, as the Redwood Falls area population ages, residents are aware of the need to retain and attract more young people to maintain a consistent population size into the future. This is one reason area residents are interested in making the Redwood Falls area a family friendly community and marketing it as such. Respondents described a number of strategies for achieving this goal. The most frequently mentioned strategies were drawing locals back to Redwood Falls after they finish college, and attracting young professionals and families. Showing local high school students options for career opportunities in the area, and attracting new businesses to the area to provide more job opportunities were also mentioned.

Challenges Attracting and Retaining the Next Generation: Shortages in Amenities, Broadband, Housing, and Daycare

Respondents note various barriers to attracting young people to the area: there are few amenities providing popular types of recreational activities for people in their 20s and 30s, and few established avenues for people in this age group to meet one another and socialize. Specifically, interviewees and focus group participants frequently cited the need for amenities such as a nice restaurant, a bar, or a nice movie theater where community members can go to spend time and meet people.[11] One focus group member described her experience moving to the community and turning to Google to find clubs and activities, but was disappointed to find that, though some exist, they were challenging to connect with as they had no online presence.

An additional barrier to attracting young professionals to the area is the shortage of acceptable broadband access. This is also a barrier to attracting new business, and limits capabilities of existing businesses in the area. Several respondents expressed the wish for the area to be able to attract professionals who may choose to telecommute to jobs in other geographic areas, and noted that this would be an excellent way to support population stability. Although two respondents did state that they were able to telecommute to jobs in other areas, they reported a significant struggle in establishing the necessary internet connection to do so. Overall, the needed broadband for such work is not consistently accessible throughout the area, and this is a challenge that area residents are working to overcome, as discussed in Part 3.

Another major barrier to attracting workers is a shortage of rental housing and day care providers. Although real estate is available for purchase, it is often difficult for workers who first move to an area to immediately purchase real estate. Additionally, focus group participants lamented their need to drive to neighboring towns for day care providers. These issues are especially challenging for younger families that have young children and/or are not yet able to purchase a home. Because of these barriers, even though jobs are available, the city is struggling to attract people for those jobs because workers are forced to live in surrounding areas, or drive a distance for child care. Thankfully, Redwood Industries, a local company that in the past has

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[11] Although downtown Redwood Falls does have a movie theater, it was frequently cited as an example of an outdated and unattractive facility that is in need of renovation in order to be fully enjoyed.

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provided services entirely in commercial development, has begun work to construct a residential housing tract to create rental units.

Addressing Challenges through Improving Broadband and Community Assets

Despite the various challenges that the Redwood Falls area is facing, numerous community members have concrete ideas for and are actively working toward mitigating and solving these problems. One important solution that can potentially address multiple aspects of the community's challenges is the work currently being undertaken on increasing access to broadband. Improving broadband accessibility throughout the area can help attract new business and residents, as well as help existing businesses improve services and expand their geographic reach. **Blandin has supported broadband work in Redwood County through its broadband grants.** More information on broadband work completed, current efforts, and hopes for the future will be discussed in the next section of this report.

Another solution that the community has devoted significant time, energy, and resources into is improving, creating, and maintaining the many assets and activities that are intended to make the community a family-friendly place to live, as discussed previously. Numerous respondents have described how these assets may help draw people to the area in order to satisfy the goal of maintaining a consistent population over time.

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Part 3. What it Takes to Create Community Vibrancy

In this case study project, we aimed to discover what greater Redwood Falls area residents felt would be needed in order to make their community more healthy and vibrant. However, we knew that asking respondents to provide detailed and concrete answers to the very vague and abstract question "what do you need to make your community a better place?" would be asking a lot of respondents. Therefore, to gather this information, we used a technique called solution-focused contextual interviewing.

With this approach, we asked the question in two stages in order to help respondents concretize and clarify their thinking before responding. First, we asked respondents to imagine what, in their perspective, an ideal community would look like. Once they had established a concrete picture in their minds of the type of community they would ideally want to create, we asked respondents what, specifically, they would need to create that ideal community. Using this two part approach, respondents were able to provide concrete and detailed information on what they thought they would need in order to create their ideal community—essentially, what it would take to make positive change and create community vibrancy.

Another advantage of using the solution-focused interview technique is that it allowed respondents to define the elements that create an ideal community for themselves. We understand that, within a community, there will always be diverse worldviews that inform individual perspectives. This is especially true for what individuals use to define the health of their community, which may or may not include the strength of the economy, level of inclusion and communication, physical health and safety, among many other possibilities. Redwood Falls area residents were eager to talk about what they would need to achieve their goals of creating community vibrancy. They first described the goals they would want to attain, and then discussed what would be needed to realize these goals in terms of resources, supports, and motivations.

Community Vibrancy through Renovating Downtown Redwood Falls

One of the most frequently mentioned goals for improving the community that we heard from respondents was to reinvigorate downtown Redwood Falls. Respondents listed two primary reasons for this goal: a more vibrant downtown would make the area more appealing to younger residents and tourists (who, as previously discussed, the community is trying to attract), and would correspondingly vitalize existing and new business. As one participant described "the city itself, the loss of local businesses… it's just a diminishment."

Specific changes that would make downtown more appealing for younger residents and tourists are updating the movie theater, incorporating more art throughout the downtown area, and adding a bar and more restaurants. Changes that would benefit businesses would be to

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renovate the storefronts and outdated buildings, and to move new businesses into the downtown strip.

Currently, many of the prime businesses are located on the main highway strip that leads into Redwood Falls (Bridge Street), located to the north of the historic downtown. One respondent described the addition of new businesses in downtown as "bringing the heartbeat back into downtown." Another respondent reminisced about what downtown used to be like, how it is currently lacking, and how it has the potential to be much more:

Figure 4. Downtown Redwood Falls

> In the '80s, downtown was a thriving, retail corridor, but since then it has lost that edge and downtown had suffered. Businesses moved to the highway strip, Walmart came, the school moved to edge of town. Downtown had been left behind. It was a turn of the century downtown built from 1886 to the 1930s, so it has neat buildings and is a neat business center for two blocks in each direction.

Barriers to Renovating Downtown Redwood Falls

However, there are barriers to completing this downtown renovation. Interviewees and focus group participants explained that there is a sense that owners of several of the outdated and unkempt buildings are resistant to taking action, or that they are trying to sell their buildings at a value above reasonable market rate. One respondent familiar with the situation explained, "We can't control what the owner will do with that building as much as we would like to." Other barriers are the financial cost involved in renovating old buildings, as well as the risk involved in investing financially and otherwise in the project.

Figure 5. Downtown Redwood Falls

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Revitalizing Downtown: How to make it Happen

"Showing the Potential"

When asked what might be motivational factors for making the needed improvements, respondents close to the situation suggested that **"showing people what the potential is" can be a prime, overarching strategy**. Of course financial resources are important. But **more than funding, respondents spoke about getting the word out and getting people excited about the project.** Notably, this is the same approach that Mark and Susan drew upon to build momentum and support for Celebrate Redwood Falls.

We spoke with two respondents who are actively working to garner support for downtown revitalization, one of whom completed a study on revitalizing downtown Redwood Falls as part of a master's degree program in Construction Real Estate Development. These community leaders have acquired plans and diagrams of every property in downtown, purchased a downtown building, have spoken about the project on a local radio program, and contributed to several newspaper articles in the *Redwood Falls Gazette*. These leaders took the building plans to various board meetings to talk with community members about revitalization efforts: "I brought diagrams to the port authority and it was a very well-attended meeting. People were getting excited." **They found that once people began to understand what was possible, momentum began to build.**

One leader elaborated:

> There was one individual on a board who looked at what was happening downtown and said 'we need to tear down the old buildings.' The same happened with the Redwood County Museum – it is an old building and people said they should tear it down.

This leader told others about the potential to renovate rather than demolish the buildings, and provided ideas about what could be done with specific buildings once they were renovated, such as putting in a downtown hostel. The leader felt that people began to hear the message: "One downtown business owner said, 'if you [renovate those buildings] I won't move. I was going to move to the strip but won't if you make that investment.'" Subsequently, according to this community leader, three businesses have moved in to the downtown area, reducing empty storefronts. These two community leaders also decorated one window of an unused building to improve the view from the street. They describe these changes as "re-energizing and showing possibilities."

Figure 6. Downtown Redwood Falls

Drawing on Networking and Leadership

Another respondent who specified downtown renovation as a necessary change for improving the community listed collaboration and networking as prime factors needed in order to achieve that goal. She described:

> We need to continue to have city government work with other entities, businesses and entities like the chamber and try to get things done rather than working on our own initiative. We have a lot of good thinkers running their own road and that can be hard if people don't see that they can make their roads run parallel.

When prompted for more specifics on necessary motivational factors for completing downtown renovation, this respondent immediately began speaking of the Blandin leadership training. She explained that the training itself provides a large amount of motivation for graduates to do community work, and referencing that a new cohort was completing the leadership program around the time of our interview, it was her belief that the motivation spurred by Blandin leadership training would contribute to downtown renovations and other important community projects being completed. She stated:

> I have hope for these initiatives coming together because we have this [Blandin leadership] class coming together that will come to get these things worked on. When you come out of Blandin you're ready to take on the world. You learn fast you can't do everything, but you're asked to take an initiative up and try to make a difference. I have high hopes that some of this will get done because grads will come out and we're already having these conversations so they'll come and join us.

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Community members discussing what would be needed to renovate downtown listed many of the same factors necessary for change-making that were brought up throughout this study across various projects and areas of community work. Although at least one community member did mention the importance of funding and willingness to take risk, **respondents primarily cited collaboration and partnership, networking, strong leadership (specifically in this case, motivation provided through Blandin leadership training), and "showing people what's possible" as what is needed in order to achieve their goal of revitalizing downtown Redwood Falls.**

Figure 7. Downtown Redwood Falls

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Community Vibrancy through Improving Broadband Access

The section of this case study on community challenges discusses the need for increased access to broadband service. As a common challenge, it is unsurprising that this issue was raised when community members outlined what their ideal community would look like and how they would create it. Several individuals spoke of various benefits to having improved broadband, one of which is the ability of local businesses to provide better customer service. For example, one business owner described that optimal customer service at her business would involve showing "how-to" videos from YouTube to customers and discussing the videos with them, but that this is impossible with current internet service capabilities. Another respondent, when asked to imagine what could be possible with broadband access, referenced a scenario in which a local bookseller sold to her local community, but with broadband and an e-commerce site, would be able to vastly increase her earning potential by selling globally. Community members spoke of broadband benefits to students who need internet access to do homework, and benefits to adult and elderly residents who want to use the internet to research topics like health issues or do online banking.

Redwood County has received broadband support from Blandin Foundation, and has completed the Intelligent Community Framework assessment and strategic planning process, which resulted in a list of community-generated, ranked, project ideas. Various community leaders are currently working on broadband-based projects in different sectors, and are submitting proposals for funding to Blandin (one set of proposals was submitted June 2015, and the other will be submitted in December 2015). Highlights of proposed projects are to obtain telemedicine capabilities at the hospital, to create technology trainings for elderly residents of an assisted living facility to enable them to use the internet for Skyping with family members or doing personal research, and to host public technology trainings at the government center.

Building Community Support through Education and Marketing

Respondents described what would be needed to achieve broadband accessibility in the community in terms of two basic resource areas. First, it is a known fact that a significant amount of funding is required for the infrastructural work necessary to deliver broadband throughout rural areas. The second area, however, was not as obvious. Respondents repeatedly spoke of the need to educate the community about why broadband is important, and as a result, to garner more support for broadband and more motivation among a broader base of volunteers in order to carry out the work. One respondent with knowledge of the financial side of such projects explained that this strong and broad base of community support is vital because it must be leveraged by local politicians to lobby in the political arena for what could potentially be sums in the millions of dollars for infrastructural work. Thus, a handful of community members realize that **the key to achieving broadband goals is building a strong base of community support and motivation for the project. This largely depends on community education and marketing**, and to address this, two **key community leaders are currently collaborating** on a marketing grant proposal for the project to be submitted to Blandin in December 2015. At least one, if not both, of these leaders are Blandin leadership

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program alumni, again **showing the intersection of different types of Blandin support** at work.

When asked about motivating factors for supporting broadband efforts, respondents repeatedly listed necessity—that people simply reach the threshold of frustration with limited internet capabilities, and know they need more. Respondents also felt that once more people gain the knowledge of what they could do if they had broadband access, they will have increased motivation to pursue it. **Thus, necessity and knowledge of what could be possible were described by community members as key motivators** for supporting broadband work. Notably, these same motivations were listed as factors for building the Redwood Area Community Center and the aquatic center, and for downtown revitalization efforts.

Community Members see all Grant Sizes as Valuable and Impactful

This case study explores many of the successful projects and changes that have taken place in the Redwood Falls area, as well as the community's vision for the future. In addition to the community resources, such as leadership, collaboration, networking, and drive, that have helped to make these projects possible, it is important to recognize that financial resources were needed, in some form, to support each project.

As a part of this case study, we conversed with community members and those involved in community projects about their perceptions of the pros and cons of grants of various sizes. While several interviewees recognized that it is tempting to be drawn to or favor larger grants, there are many contexts in which smaller amounts of funding may be more appropriate or effective. For example, it may be impossible for organizations to raise the required matching funds for larger grants. One respondent explained:

> A lot of what seems to drive it is the requirement from the grant source as to what the matching requirements are, matching funds. Boy they'd love $100,000 for the celebration, but if they have to match that with an additional $100,000, then maybe it's not going to happen. I've seen that be a strong component in determining what size grant a nonprofit will be going after.

Despite this, although difficult, gathering large amounts of matching funds is possible. One community member described how the Friends of the Park organization managed to leverage multiple layers of matching funds to reach a $200,000 goal for refurbishing a park shelter. The work began with a hotdog sale and pony rides at a community fundraiser, the proceeds of which were matched by the city. Then these collective funds were combined with monies from a private foundation, the total of which was used to match a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) grant. The community member relaying this story summed it up as: "It was very hard work—it takes an awful lot of collaboration to make that happen!" **This is an excellent example of the skillful leveraging of multiple sizes of funding, as well as further support for the importance of collaboration for work in the community.**

Another factor mentioned about larger grants is that they may be more likely to have more strings attached, such as strict or public reporting requirements. Smaller organizations may not have the staff necessary to keep up with extensive reporting or other administrative requirements that may be required for many larger grants, and therefore, may choose to pursue smaller grants.

At the same time, large projects, generally with a specific goal, are made easier with a single, large grant. For example, the $100,000 Blandin grant for the Tatanka Bluffs project was used to design and implement physical improvements, and this was an appropriate funding size for that component of the project. However, another major focus of the project is to acquire the privately-held land in the area to create a continuous land bridge along the Minnesota River Valley, and funding amounts much larger than $100,000 are needed for land acquisition. A project leader explained, "Larger grants are needed to move mountains. Many times the local [units of government] and [nonprofit organizations] simply don't have the total resources for

mountain removal. It's hard to move a mountain with a spoon." Other types of projects that require especially large funding amounts are things such as infrastructure, like broadband and transit projects.

Several participants recognized that small grants can also be used as catalysts or momentum-builders. Small grants can also be combined with volunteer labor and in-kind support. Multiple leaders spoke of small grants as "seed money" that can be used to get people together and build community engagement for their project. Small grants are also beneficial for helping people grow their ideas and gain momentum. A successful community leader explained this concept through metaphor:

> Little grants are extremely important – they help jumpstart little projects that can become big. They ignite a passion in an individual – the metaphor is if you look at the population as prairie grass, we have some passionate but dormant grasses out there, but if you start a couple of them on fire, you can create a big fire. The first step is to get the momentum going. Blandin grads get one fast-start grant of up to $5,000 to help jump-start projects, and this is critically important.

In sum, although some respondents did initially express that a billion dollars to achieve their dreams would be nice, overall, the community members with whom we spoke suggested that **funding amounts of all sizes, whether $5,000, $100,000, or $10 million, have the capacity to create substantial impact for community work.** Different funding amounts are appropriate for different purposes, and at different stages of a project. **Moreover, respondents were ready to point out that non-monetary resources, such as collaboration, leadership skills, and networking, are as important to success in community work as is funding.** One respondent explained, "You always need other types of resources – whether it's human resources with leadership skills or fundraising skills, whatever is needed for that project."

One very astute respondent jumped in to do our analysis for us, stating:

> **At the end of the day I think [Blandin Foundation] is looking for how their investment was leveraged. And you can't put a price tag on it, it's huge.** [There's a] good sense of what the monetary numbers are, but it's not just that because all these other things wouldn't be in place. Look at the [Tatanka Arts] artists' group—they're selling their art. One of the real estate companies got a little corner and partnered with the city and they made a little heritage park square here in downtown. **Just those little things that you can't put a price tag on that have happened, and we say, oh yeah, that's tied to CALP.**

Another respondent summarized the non-monetary impact of Blandin investments in another way, as emerging through motivation and understanding: "Blandin's investment paid off in two ways – graduates who have passion for a project and go out and do it. Then there's a greater depth of understanding."

Many important factors needed for community work are not monetary support

Throughout the study, a number of factors were repeatedly mentioned as necessary for successful community improvement work, most of which were not monetary support. **Highly important factors are collaboration and partnership.** The importance of good relationships (especially between Native and non-Native communities) was also discussed, as good relationships are required for successful collaboration and partnerships.

Closely linked to each of these topics is the importance of having connections to many people—a process often successfully facilitated through networking. Networking was a technique described to facilitate various needed processes, including spreading information (such as knowledge of programs, or requests for volunteers) into the community, finding individuals with needed information or resources, and "borrowing" trust or perceived legitimacy by working through networks of individuals generally perceived as trusted.

Good leadership skills are highly valued, and leadership training provided by Blandin is consistently described as exceptionally valuable across a wide range of facets of community and personal work. **Moreover, Blandin leadership training is described as providing extensive networks as well as close, positive relationships. Finally, the ability to increase positivity and help others change negative attitudes, having a "can-do" attitude, and the willingness to take risks were discussed as important factors for creating a vibrant community.**

Conclusion

This case study was carried out to provide insight into a set of questions for Blandin Foundation. The perspectives and experiences relayed by community member respondents provided insight into these questions through the context of the Redwood Falls area community. Blandin Foundation's questions, and summary highlights of insight provided as pertaining to the Redwood Falls area, are as follows:

What is needed to make change happen in the community?

Factors of prime importance in creating change in this community are working collaboratively, using networks, and having broad community support. This support is, in turn, tightly linked to being perceived as being an insider to the community. Change is more easily created when leaders "show what's possible" and build momentum, often through taking a risk to get things started. Momentum is more easily built when people perceive tangible results from efforts made, even if results are on a small scale. This notion supports the value that small and incremental forms of support can have on creating community impact.

How has Blandin Foundation affected and not affected change in the community?

One of the greatest ways in which Blandin Foundation has affected change in the community is through the effects of leadership program training. Leadership alumni are active in many, if not most, of the successful projects described by community members, and apply gains from the program in numerous ways—from skills of collaboration to benefits of expanded networks. Leadership alumni contribute to community successes through projects supported by a variety of sources—both Blandin and non-Blandin funded. Ways in which respondents described that Blandin could continue to positively impact the community are by continuing to offer leadership training, and to help facilitate networking across leadership cohorts and between BCLP and BRCLP, as detailed below.

To what extent has Blandin Foundation seen, understood, and responded to community priorities?

Overall, respondents expressed that Blandin Foundation has seen, understood, and responded well to the community's priorities. Blandin was very responsive in adjusting content of the BRCLP to better align with to community members' experiences. Respondents also expressed gratitude for the large number of individuals who have been given the opportunity to complete Blandin leadership training, and note the positive impact that having more leadership alumni makes on successful community outcomes. Respondents have also noted that receiving other forms of Blandin support, including grants and broadband support, have helped them successfully address various community priorities.

How do Blandin Foundation resources interact with other factors that influence and drive community change, such as other resources and work occurring?

One of the primary ways in which Blandin Foundation resources interact with other community change factors is in the broad impact of the leadership programs. Numerous projects described by community members as having high levels of community impact were at least partially led by Blandin leadership alumni, but were funded either partially or entirely through non-Blandin sources. Thus, Blandin leadership support is intersecting very successfully with non-Blandin sources of support and funding. Additionally, Blandin support for broadband work has fueled

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numerous project proposals that, if successful, will engage other resources, creating the potential to drive major community change.

How do networks form and sustain themselves?

Networks in the area are formed when one or a small group of individuals champion a project and work to get others involved to build momentum. Networks sustain themselves by engaging enough people so that no one individual is overworked and by building momentum through a series of small successes. Respondents described that networks can lose influence by not engaging the younger generation, avoiding succession planning, or becoming too stuck in their ways to adapt to change. Blandin leadership alumni reported that the leadership programs are a prime way to build large and successful networks. Some alumni expressed a desire for more structured opportunities for networking with other alumni, especially across cohorts. An opportunity also exists for structured networking between BCLP and BRCLP alumni, which could also positively impact goals for building better relations between Native and non-Native communities.

Have different funding levels led to different results (e.g., have higher funding levels necessarily made more impact)?

Community members perceive that higher funding levels *do not* necessarily make more impact than lower funding levels. A number of respondents suggested that all funding levels, from small start-up grants to multi-million dollar grants, can have great value to projects when applied to the appropriate stage of a project and for an appropriate purpose. Small grants can have great impact when used to generate momentum, and are much appreciated for this value. However, some project components, such as land acquisition, require large amounts of funding. Overall, community members agreed that when applied for the appropriate purpose and stage of project, all funding levels can be very impactful.

What change would the community like to see in the future?

Community members, when asked about future change they would like for their community, expressed a desire for several interrelated factors: improved relations between Native and non-Native communities; a reinvigorated downtown Redwood Falls, with the potential to lead to improved economic vitality and attract new residents; quality broadband service, which could bring business opportunity, improved healthcare and quality of life, as well as new residents; and the ability to support the new residents needed to sustain the community's population into the future, through things like more rental housing and adequate child care.

In summary, when we began conducting outreach to gather participants to inform this case study, there was no lack of excitement on the part of community members to talk about their experiences with Blandin Foundation, and their perspectives on the Redwood Falls area community in general. Throughout the conversations that informed this study, people continually pointed to their vast number of accomplishments and points of pride. In large part, many of the stories that people were eager to share involved strong leadership, networking, and collaborations. Blandin leadership alumni and non-alumni alike were quick to point of the benefits that the leadership program has had on the community.

Community members, too, were willing to provide candid feedback about what they feel can be improved. There is an ongoing opportunity to create stronger relationships and channels of communication between Native and non-Native community members. Additionally, the

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community continues to struggle with attracting more residents, especially young professionals and families, to fill the available positions and to feel welcomed and accepted. The area can continue to market itself as a great place to raise a family – a sentiment that many participants were quick to share – but will have to be sure to provide affordable housing, available day care to support those families, and local businesses to revitalize downtown.

Overall, community members shared a sense of optimism for the future. This may largely be drawn from the successes that have been achieved so far; as we repeatedly heard, successes in Redwood Falls build off of one another to create momentum. Additionally, this sense of optimism may be from the fact that when asked about the changes that they would like to see, community members were able to point to efforts already in progress to make those changes. This common sense of optimism was well summarized by one respondent who said, "There's enough people that love and care about the community that they'll do whatever it takes to make things happen."

Appendix A: Expanded Methodology

Sampling and project participation

Through using purposeful snowball sampling, we were referred to a large number of individuals with knowledge of the community from a range of occupational backgrounds, ages, and number of years of experience living in the area. Many of the individuals we invited to participate in the study were eager to contribute by attending a community kick-off meeting, or through having an interview or attending a focus group. However, we had difficulty obtaining a sufficient number of interviews with community members who could provide depth knowledge of broadband work being done in the community. Therefore, we conducted one interview with a Blandin Foundation contractor who was involved with Blandin's broadband work in Redwood County. We used this interview to gather specific information on what work had been completed with Blandin's broadband support, and what funding requests for community broadband projects had been and were expected to be presented to Blandin as a result of the initial Blandin broadband support. We did not ask the Blandin contractor for subjective information about the community.

Data collection protocol design

In designing interview and focus group protocols, we chose to use an approach called "solution-focused contextual qualitative interviewing." This approach is useful when trying to elicit from respondents detailed, concrete answers to abstract questions. The abstract question we wanted answered was "What do you need in order to create vibrant community?" It is difficult for respondents to provide concrete answers to this type of abstract question in an interview or focus group situation. Therefore, we created multi-stage questioning routes that first asked respondents to imagine a concrete, future vibrant community of their choice, and describe the details that they saw in that future. Then, we asked respondents what, specifically, they would need in order to create the future vibrant community that they were describing. By allowing respondents to situate themselves in a context-oriented framework, this method enables respondents to provide more specifics and richer details in their answers.

Site visit and additional research

During our trip to Redwood Falls to conduct the two focus groups, we conducted a brief, self-guided tour of locations that were frequently mentioned in the phone interviews that we had completed. This tour included downtown Redwood Falls, Ramsey Park, the Redwood Falls library, and the Redwood Falls Aquatic Center. Spending some time exploring Redwood Falls helped us visualize the community assets and projects described by respondents, and enabled us to take the photos that are included in this case study. We conducted limited additional research using documents and data provided by Blandin Foundation, and using websites, news articles, and video clips recommended to us by respondents.

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Appendix B: Evaluation questions

Blandin Foundation's specific goals included learning from the following primary evaluation questions:[12]

Evaluation Questions

1. What do people in Redwood Falls need to make change happen in their community?

2. How has Blandin affected change in Redwood Falls?
   a. How do the Foundation's various investments interact with each other and influence the change process?
   b. In what cases have projects funded with Blandin investments failed to meet goals for change-making? Why?
   c. What would have needed to be done differently to meet goals for change-making?

3. To what extent has Blandin Foundation seen, understood, and responded to the priorities of Redwood Falls?

4. How do Blandin Foundation resources interact with other factors that influence and drive community change, such as other resources and work occurring?

5. How have networks formed in Redwood Falls, and what do networks need in order to achieve their goals?
   a. Have Blandin's Leadership Program and/or Blandin grants affected the ability of networks to create change in Redwood Falls? If so, how? If not, why not?

6. Have different levels of funding led to different results (e.g. have higher funding levels necessarily made more impact)?
   a. What other factors are important for change to occur (e.g. building networks, infrastructure?)?

7. What change would Redwood Falls like to see in the future?

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[12] This study was also guided by a set of more detailed secondary evaluation questions, which are presented in the appendix.

Appendix C: Data Collection Protocols

Three primary protocols guided data collection for this study: an interview protocol, a protocol for the focus group comprised of Blandin leadership alumni, and a similar protocol for the focus group comprised of community members with varying levels of familiarity with Blandin Foundation. The interview protocol is lengthy and has sections addressing a) community experience in general, b) the Blandin leadership program, c) broadband work, d) the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor, and e) the Sunktanka Youth Development Program (the last two sections pertaining to two Blandin grant funded projects). Very few interviewees were asked questions from all of these sections, rather, we selected portions of the protocol to use with different interviewees depending on their areas of knowledge and experience, in order to keep interviews to an appropriate length of time. The three protocols are provided below.

Interview protocol

1 – 1.5 hour-long recorded phone interviews
Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. As a reminder, I am with the Improve group, an independent research company based in St. Paul, and we are working with Blandin Foundation on a project to learn more about their work in Redwood Falls. Specifically, for this project, we are conducting a case study about Redwood Falls which will explore Blandin's involvement in the community, other factors and resources that have helped shaped the community over time, and how these have interacted.

We understand that there is a varying level of familiarity with Blandin Foundation and the work that they have done, and that's fine – especially because we are just as interested in non-Blandin resources. Because of this, you can of course choose not to answer any of the questions that I ask you today for any reason.

Additionally, because some of the topics that we're going to be talking about – like community change – can be a little abstract at times, I have some questions that may sound strange, but asking them helps to get people thinking about these types of topics.

We will be conducting a series of interviews and focus groups with Redwood Falls residents, and will combine all responses across major theme wherever possible when we share the results with Blandin Foundation. However, because of the relatively small number of interviewees and the potentially unique experiences that they share, it may be possible that some identifiable information may remain.

Background and Community

1. **How long have you been a member of the Redwood Falls area community?**
    a. What role(s) do you play in the community?
    b. What community events or projects are you a part of?

2. **In general, how familiar are you with Blandin Foundation?**

a.   What comes to mind when you think about Blandin Foundation's work in Redwood Falls?

b.   In your opinion, how well has Blandin Foundation responded to the needs of the community?
Prompt: Did Blandin recognize and understand the needs and/or priorities of the community?

3. **Let's pretend that you go to sleep tonight, and while you're sleeping, you don't know it, but a miracle happens. Because of this miracle, Redwood Falls transforms overnight into your ideal version of the community. Now remember, this all happened while you were sleeping, and you don't know about it. When you wake up in the morning, you start going about your day as normal. What is the first thing that you notice that tips you off that you are now in your ideal Redwood Falls?**

    a.   As you go about your day, what else do you notice that is different? How is that different from the way things are now?

    b.   What would it take to make these changes into a reality?

4. **In what other ways do you think the Redwood Falls area community could be improved?**

    a.   What can community members do to address these areas of improvement?
    Prompt: Are people working to make these changes already? If so, what is being done? If no, what would people need to make these changes? What else can be done?
    Prompt: What can community members do to address these areas of improvement?

    b.   What motivates people in the Redwood Falls Area to take action or make change?
    Prompt: What would it take to get people to act on making these changes?

5. **What are the biggest changes that happened in the community in the past 10 – 15 years?**

    a.   What factors have supported these changes? In what ways?

6. **When you think about the changes that have occurred in Redwood Falls, do people tend to work individually or in networks to create change?**

    a.   What have people accomplished by working individually? In networks?

    b.   Can you think of any examples of people using networks to achieve goals or create change in Redwood Falls?
    Prompt: What happened? How did the network form?
    Prompt: How did they work together? What change did they influence?

Next, we are interested in getting your perspective about what people are able to accomplish with different sizes and types of grant funding.

7. **What types of things are people able to accomplish with smaller grants?**
    Prompt: What are reasonable goals for projects of this size?

    a.   What types of things are people able to accomplish with larger grants?

    b.   What are the pros and cons of small and large grants?

    c.   In what ways can people use small grants to leverage other resources (such as other sources of funding, time, support of other organizations, etc.)? What about large grants?

Prompt: Can you share any examples where a grant was able to leverage other resources (especially those previously mentioned) in the Redwood Falls Area? Was this related to the size of the grant?

    d. What other resources or factors, beyond grant funding, help people in Redwood Falls accomplish goals?

8. **What advice do you have for Blandin Foundation, or any other funding organization, to make sure they are responding to the Redwood Falls area community's priorities?**

Leadership

9. **How familiar are you with Blandin's community leadership programs?**
Prompt: Have you gone through it yourself? Do you know anyone that has participated?

For alumni:

10. **What influenced your decision to participate in the leadership program?**
    a. What did you gain from the leadership program?
    Prompt: Did you develop any practical or usable skills? Create connections in the community? Personal changes?
    b. Are there ways in which you have been able to apply any of what you gained to the work that you do in the community
    Prompt: skills, confidence, connections, structure of work groups, etc.?
        i. How has what you gained in the leadership program benefitted the work that you do? What was the result?
        ii. To what extent has the leadership program impacted your professional network?
        Prompt: in what ways?
        iii. Did anything else support that work? For example, other community resources or supports, or sources of funding.

For non-alumni:

11. **What, if any, changes in the community are you aware of that were influenced by the leadership program? For example, any projects that leadership alumni have worked on?**
    a. What impact have these changes had on the community?
    b. What else influenced those changes or made them possible? For example, other community resources or supports, or sources of funding.

Broadband

Broadband – General:

12. **What, if any, efforts are you aware of being undertaken to increase access to and use of broadband in the Redwood Falls community?**
    a. In what ways do you think increased access to broadband will impact the community?
    b. What motivated people to work on this project?

Broadband Projects Experts:

13. What influenced Redwood Falls' decision to apply for funding for Broadband from Blandin Foundation? What motivated people to get this work going?
14. Who has been involved in the Redwood Falls broadband work?
    a. What roles have they played?
15. What is currently going on with this work? What is in progress and what has already been accomplished?
16. What has changed since the broadband work began? How has broadband work impacted the Redwood Falls area community?
17. What other factors/resources have helped to support this work? What else has made it possible?
18. To what extent was Blandin Foundation able to respond to the needs of the community through this work?
    a. Where were needs most met?
    b. Where were they not met?
19. Did any other Blandin Foundation efforts in Redwood Falls (leadership, Tatanka Bluffs, Sunktanka Youth Development) support this work? If so, how?
20. What are the next steps moving forward?

Sunktanka Native Youth Development Program

Sunktanka – General:

21. **Are you familiar with the Sunktanka Native Youth Development Program?**
    a. In what ways has the Sunktanka program affected change in the Redwood Falls Area community?
    b. What motivated people to work on this project?

Sunktanka Project Experts:

22. What are the major goals of the Sunktanka Youth Development program? Who does it serve and what do they do?
23. What influenced the program's decision to apply for funding from Blandin Foundation?
24. What was the program able to do with this funding?
    a. Did any changes occur because of the funding?
    b. Were there any goals that you thought you'd be able to achieve with the Blandin funding that were not achieved? If so, what got in the way?
25. What other resources – monetary and non – help to support the program?
    Prompt: other sources of funding? Volunteer time? Community efforts? Partnerships?
26. Do you think this program has influenced any changes in the community? If so, what?
    a. Were there any unexpected changes? If so, what?
27. Can you share any feedback that you have received from participants or their family members about the program and what they think about it?
28. To what extent was Blandin Foundation able to respond to the needs of the community through this work?
    a. Where were needs most met?
    b. Where were they not met?
29. Did any other Blandin Foundation efforts in Redwood Falls (leadership, broadband, Tatanka Bluffs) support this work? If so, how?

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30. Thinking back, do you have any ideas for what could have been done differently to improve the project or achieve larger outcome?
    a. What advice would you give to your past self?

Tatanka Bluffs Corridor

Tatanka Bluffs – General:

31. **Are you familiar with the Tatanka Bluffs corridor project, or the renovations that the Bluffs have undergone in the past few years**?
    a. In what ways has the Tatanka Bluffs project affected change in the Redwood Falls Area community?
    b. What motivated people to work on this project?

Tatanka Bluffs Expert:

32. How did the idea for this project come about? Why did the project decide to apply for funding? Who was involved? What motivated people to get this going?
33. What activities were funded by the Blandin grant? What, specifically, was achieved with the Blandin grant funding?
    a. Where any goals from the grant not met? If so, what?
34. What other resources supported the project?
    Prompt: other sources of funding? Volunteer time? Community efforts? Partnerships?
35. Did any other Blandin Foundation efforts in Redwood Falls (leadership, broadband, Sunktanka Youth Development) support this work? If so, how?
36. What impact has the project had on the Redwood Falls area community?
37. Do you think this project has influenced any changes in the community? If so, what?
    a. Were there any unexpected changes? If so, what?
38. Can you share any feedback that you have received from community members about the project and what they think about it?
39. To what extent was Blandin Foundation able to respond to the needs of the community through this work?
    a. Where were needs most met?
    b. Where were they not met?
40. Thinking back, do you have any ideas for what could have been done differently to improve the project or achieve larger outcome?
    a. What advice would you give to your past self?

Focus group protocol – leadership alumni

Redwood Falls Focus Group Protocol

Attendees: Blandin Leadership Program alumni

3:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Addresses:

- Influence of Blandin Leadership Programs on community work

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- Perceptions of the ideal Redwood Falls and desires for how to get there
- Role of networks in making the community a better place

Length of session: 90 minutes

Introduction (5 min): 3:00 – 3:05

- Thank participants for coming, please help yourself to food!
- Introduce ourselves and the Improve Group
- Blandin Foundation has asked the Improve Group to help them learn more about the Redwood Falls community. Blandin will use what they learn to explore how they can be the best partner possible for rural Minnesota communities. We will make the results of this conversation available to you when completed.
- You are experts on your community and we want to learn from you. We asked you to participate in this focus group because we want your insights on how you create a healthy, vibrant community, but we don't expect you to know all the specifics of what projects Blandin has funded. We just want to hear about your perspectives on your community, how Redwood Falls gets things done, and the influence the Blandin Leadership Programs has had on your work.
- This session will hopefully be fun, unusual, and creative. I will ask you to use your imagination, and be a dreamer. We will create a safe space for everyone to share their ideas. Everyone's ideas are equally important and we want to hear from everyone. So if you're giving a lot of input I may ask you to allow others to chime in, and if you're being especially quiet I may ask you for your thoughts. We will not indicate who said what when we write up the study. There are no right or wrong answers.
- We would like to audio record this session so that we can have a back-up copy for whatever we miss in our note taking, and to be sure that we reflect your ideas correctly. We will not share the recording with anyone.

Opening Question (5 min): 3:05 – 3:10

- Tell us:
    o Your name
    o One sentence on your favorite thing about Redwood Falls

Blandin Leadership Programs (20 min): 3:10 – 3:30

- What did you gain from going through Blandin's leadership program?
    o *(Prompts if needed: skills, meeting people, creating structure of groups for continuing work, ideas, motivation, status in the community/cultural capital)*
- How does being a Blandin leadership program alum affect work you do to make your community a better, healthier place?
    o *(Prompts if needed: How have skills you gained affected your community work? How has becoming connected to people as a result of the leadership program affected your community work? Gaining status, recognition?)*
- What outcomes have resulted from this work you have done in the community?
- As we move through today's session, please keep thinking back to how Blandin's leadership programs may be shaping work done in Redwood Falls and improvements being made in the community, and feel free to bring up those connections as we talk.

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The Ideal Redwood Falls (Time Capsule into the Future) (20 min): 3:30 – 3:50

- I'm going to ask you to imagine that we are all stepping inside a magic time capsule. We are propelling forward in time—and we land--10 years into the future. The year is 2025, and we are stepping out of the time capsule. The magic part about this time capsule is it is bringing us to **your ideal** Redwood Falls. As we exit the time capsule, we are stepping into Redwood Falls just as you want it to be (and that may be different for each of you). Look around. Notice where you are standing, what part of town you are in, who is around you.
  o What do you notice that is different from how Redwood Falls is today?
  o One word that has been thrown out is vibrant. Is that a word that you'd use to describe what you're experiencing in this ideal Redwood Falls? What are some things that you're experiencing that say "vibrant" to you?
  o How did people get Redwood Falls into this ideal community?
    ▪ *(Prompts if needed: could be anything: time, people, energy, infrastructure, money, etc.)*
  o What factors other than financial resources are necessary to make Redwood Falls into this ideal community that you're envisioning?
    ▪ *(Prompts if needed: infrastructure, networks)*
  o What would motivate you to do this type of work to make Redwood Falls into your ideal community?
  o What barriers would you find in carrying out this work?

How networks in Redwood Falls work and improve the community (20 min): 3:50 – 4:10

- Take a minute to think about what networks you are or have been a part of. This could be Rotary Club or other club, a parenting or school group, a spiritual community or congregation, or even a group of people from different organizations that is working together on a common project or goal. Think about what you do within those networks, and what the networks as a whole do.
  o PRIORITY: Let's throw out some names of networks that you belong to, or have belonged to in the past.
  o How did these networks get started in Redwood Falls?
  o What motivated you to get connected to these networks?
  o For those of you who are still connected to these networks, what keeps you staying involved?
  o PRIORITY: What kinds of things are needed to keep these networks going? To achieve their goals?
  o What are some ways in which working in networks has created positive change for Redwood Falls?
  o PRIORITY: Has the Blandin Leadership Program had any effect on how networks are working in Redwood Falls? In change-making?
  o I'm going to ask you to think of a network you have been involved with, and in your mind, rate the level of influence that network has in the community on a scale from 0 to 5, with 0 being no influence, and 5 being a lot of influence. Have you got a rating? Now, if you wanted to increase that level of influence by one or two points, what would have to happen? What would decrease the level of influence of your network?

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- - If you wanted to improve something in Redwood Falls, would you try to do it by yourself, or from within a network? Why? How can networks be used to make more impactful improvements in Redwood Falls?

Ending Question (10 min): 4:10 – 4:20

- Summarize what we've talked about:
  - Influence of leadership programs on community work
  - Time capsule to future: what is needed, and barriers to creating the ideal Redwood Falls
  - Networks and how they create improvements in the community
- What else is important regarding work in the community that we haven't talked about?

Closing (2 min)

- Thank you all very much for your valuable insights!
- We had fun and we hope that this session was at least a little fun for you too.
- Our next steps will be to collect more information from community members, then we will write about what we learned and share that with you.
- If you have any questions you can contact us at Amy Cyr, amyc@theimprovegroup.com, 651-447-5543, or Courtney Clingan at courtneyc@theimprovegroup.com, 651-315-8920.

Focus group protocol – non-leadership alumni community members

Redwood Falls Focus Group Protocol

Attendees: Redwood Falls residents who are not Blandin Leadership Program alumni

5:30 – 7:00

Addresses:

- Perceptions of and desires for how to make Redwood Falls into a healthier, more vibrant community
- Factors that influence work for increasing community vibrancy
- Role of networks in improving the community

Length of session: 90 minutes

Introduction (5 min): 5:30 – 5:35

- Thank participants for coming, please help yourself to food!
- Introduce ourselves and the Improve Group
- Blandin Foundation has asked the Improve Group to help them learn more about the Redwood Falls community. Blandin will use what they learn to explore how they can be the best partner possible for rural Minnesota communities. We will make the results of this conversation available to you when completed.

- You are experts on your community and we want to learn from you. We asked you to participate in this focus group because we want your insights on how you create a strong and vibrant community, but we don't expect you to know all the specifics of what projects Blandin has funded. We just want to hear about your perspectives on your community, and how Redwood Falls gets things done.
- This session will hopefully be fun, unusual, and creative. I will ask you to use your imagination, and be a dreamer. We will create a safe space for everyone to share their ideas. Everyone's ideas are equally important and we want to hear from everyone. So if you're giving a lot of input I may ask you to allow others to chime in, and if you're being especially quiet I may ask you for your thoughts. We will not indicate who said what when we write up the study. There are no right or wrong answers.
- We would like to audio record this session so that we can have a back-up copy for whatever we miss in our note taking, and to be sure that we reflect your ideas correctly. We will not share the recording with anyone.

Opening Question (5 min): 5:35 – 5:40

- Tell us:
    - Your name
    - One sentence on your favorite thing about living in Redwood Falls

The Ideal Redwood Falls (Time Capsule into the Future) (15 min): 5:40 – 5:55

I'm going to ask you to imagine that we are all stepping inside a magic time capsule. We are propelling forward in time—and we land--10 years into the future. The year is 2025, and we are stepping out of the time capsule. The magic part about this time capsule is it is bringing us to **your ideal** Redwood Falls. As we exit the time capsule, we are stepping into Redwood Falls just as you want it to be (and that may be different for each of you). Look around. Notice where you are standing, what part of town you are in, who is around you.

- What do you notice that is different from how Redwood Falls is today?
- One word that has been thrown out is vibrant. Is that a word that you'd use to describe what you're experiencing in this ideal Redwood Falls? What are some things that you're experiencing that say "vibrant" to you?
- How did people get Redwood Falls into this ideal community?
    - *(Prompts if needed: could be anything: time, people, energy, infrastructure, money, etc.)*
- What would motivate you to do this type of work to make Redwood Falls into the ideal community?
- What barriers would you find in doing this work?

Factors that Influence Work to Improve Redwood Falls (Magic Boxes) (25 min): 5:55 – 6:20

Now we're going to dig into the question of how Redwood Falls was made into this vision that you have for it. I have here a magic box (show the box), and in it is—whatever you want and need in order to make Redwood Falls into the ideal community that we've been discussing. That could be time, energy, people, connections, networks, other projects that you coordinate with,

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organizations like nonprofits or government offices—even ones that don't exist yet, infrastructure, trainings, seed grants, medium grants, huge grants, anything).

- What would you pull out of this box to make Redwood Falls into this ideal?
- What types of things would lead to the greatest impact in the community?
- I want you to think about work that has been done in Redwood Falls in the past to make the community a better place, and what types of things have gone into creating results from that work. This could be grants, but it could also be knowing the right people, or coordinating efforts with others, or having nonmonetary resources such as knowledge or physical assets like a building.
  - What types of things influence results of work that people do in the community?
  - Does anyone know of an example in which support from Blandin Foundation— leadership training, grants, and/or broadband grants—worked alongside with other things like those you just mentioned in order to influence outcomes? *(Prompts: Tatanka Bluffs project, aquatic center having leadership alumni involved, etc.)*
  - If yes, they have an example including Blandin support:
    - What went into this work, both Blandin and non-Blandin support?
      - *(Prompt if needed: other grants? Networks? Material support?)*
    - How did Blandin and non-Blandin support intersect?
      - *(Prompts if needed: Do any of these sources of support help one another in influencing outcomes? How? What does that look like? What are effects?)*
    - What resulted from this work? *(probe if necessary)*
    - What are things that can get in the way of working to make the community better? How can these challenges be overcome?
  - If no, they don't have an example including Blandin support:
    - Okay, let's talk about work that did not involve Blandin Foundation support.
    - What types of support or input went into this work being done?
      - *(Prompt if needed: other grants? Networks? Trainings? Material support?)*
    - How did these types of support intersect, or work together?
      - *(Prompts if needed: Do any of these factors help one another in making change? How? What does that look like? What are effects?)*
    - What are things that can get in the way of working to make the community better? How can these challenges be overcome?
    - What resulted from this work? *(probe if necessary)*
- Now we have two magic boxes! In the first box (display box) is a really huge grant! In the second box (display second box) is a much more modestly sized grant, *plus* three other factors *of your choice*. Now think about which of these two boxes you want to have in order to reach your goals for improving the community. In a moment, I'm going to ask you which box you will choose, and why. If you choose the smaller grant with three other factors, I'll ask you what the other factors are. So I'll give you a moment to think on this. (Give a moment, then discuss):
  - Which box are you choosing? (When applicable, ask what three factors they're adding to the box)
  - Why did you decide the way you did?

- When trying to make your community healthier and more vibrant, what helps you in best using the resources you have available to you?
  - Is there anything that can help you to make resources more effective, or more efficient?

How networks in Redwood Falls work and improve the community (20 min): 6:20 – 6:40

- Take a minute to think about what networks you are or have been a part of. This could be Rotary Club or other club, a parenting or school group, a spiritual community or congregation, or even a group of people from different organizations that is working together on a common project or goal. Think about what you do within those networks, and what the networks as a whole do.
  - PRIORITY: Let's throw out some names of networks that you belong to, or have belonged to in the past.
  - How did these networks get started in Redwood Falls?
  - What motivated you to get connected to these networks?
  - For those of you who are still connected to these networks, what keeps you staying involved?
  - PRIORITY: What kinds of things are needed to keep these networks going? To achieve their goals?
  - What are some ways in which working in networks has created positive change for Redwood Falls?
  - Have any of these networks ever collaborated with Blandin Leadership Program alumni in order to achieve any goals? If so, what did that look like? What came out of it?
  - I'm going to ask you to think of a network you have been involved with, and in your mind, rate the level of influence that network has in the community on a scale from 0 to 5, with 0 being no influence, and 5 being a lot of influence. Have you got a rating? Now, if you wanted to increase that level of influence by one or two points, what would have to happen? What would decrease the level of influence of your network?
  - If you wanted to improve something in Redwood Falls, would you try to do it by yourself, or from within a network? Why? How can networks be used to make more impactful improvements in Redwood Falls?

Ending Question (10 min): 6:40 – 6:50

- Summarize what we've talked about:
  - Time capsule to future: what is needed, and barriers to creating the ideal Redwood Falls
  - Magic boxes: factors that influence community work
  - Networks and how they create improvements in the community
- What else is important regarding work in the community that we haven't talked about?

Closing (2 min)

- Thank you all very much for your valuable insights!
- We had fun and we hope that this session was at least a little fun for you too.

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- Our next steps will be to collect more information from community members, then we will write about what we learned and share that with you.
- If you have any questions you can contact us at Amy Cyr, amyc@theimprovegroup.com, 651-447-5543, or Courtney Clingan at courtneyc@theimprovegroup.com, 651-315-8920.