Bringing design to rural communities by building a web of service

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Bridging between practice, agencies, and communities

- Rural communities have limited access to professional design services due to isolation and lack of knowledge and funds.

- Agencies fund programs for community projects but the service gap prevents communities from maximizing these opportunities.

- ILR Community Visioning Program is sponsored by Iowa DOT to bridge the gap and facilitate learning, planning, and project development with practitioners and a nonprofit group.
Knowledge Transfer and Policy Deployment

As traditionally programmed in federal and state transportation agencies.
Alternative Model of Knowledge Transfer and Deployment

With social learning in rural communities, as well as within communities of practice that span agencies, private practice, and the academy

Addresses service gaps and access to resources
Social capital

- The social norms, networks of reciprocity and exchange, and relationships of trust that enable people to act collectively.

- In rural areas, social capital (as indicated by community sentiment, place identity, and place attachment) is strong, while other capitals (economic) may be weak, especially in small communities.

  (see Willis Goudy studies on persistence of rural communities)
Why social learning?

Community
- Resilient in the face of out migration/disaster
- Overcome knowledge “silos”
- Deeper and richer

Profession
- Overcome generational differences
- Overcome knowledge “silos”
- Develop and maintain a culture of service to rural areas
Why social learning?

Community

Profession
Social learning as a foundation for programming

- The collaborative or mutual development and sharing of knowledge
- by multiple stakeholders (both people and organizations)
- through learning by doing (experiential)
Groups involved

- Rural residents
- Design profession: academic, practicing, and student landscape architects
- Nonprofit facilitators
- Transportation planners and staff
Program structure facilitates learning together

- To create a web: working together in the field, among all actors, during assessments, design, and feasibility studies

- Private nonprofit
- Consultants
- Interns
- Residents
Program Structure

Knowledge Preparation Planning Issues

ISU

Landscape Architect

Trees Forever Field Coordinator

Community

Steering Committee Workshop

Local Geography

Transportation Behavior

Biophysical Analysis

Participatory Assessments

Participatory Design

Existing Plans

Synthesis Set Goals

Implementation Planning

Design

Conference

- Case Studies
- Project Displays
- Workshops

Ongoing

- Exit Interviews
- Impact Assessments

Training

- Communication
- Discussion with participants
Program structure facilitates learning together

- Guided discovery in assessment phase
- Deliberative decision making based on findings and opportunities revealed through design
Participatory action research model for assessments

- Transportation experiences, needs, and desires are explored
- Mapping, focus groups, photo activity
- Questions asked and answered
Transfer of knowledge among residents and designers during the analysis process; mapping historic places in Exira, Iowa.
Within Community
Workshops and retreats for practitioners support skill and knowledge development
Program structure facilitates learning together

- Kick-off meeting/training
- Celebration (includes reflection and peer learning)
- Evaluation
Roundtables and panels provide opportunity to reflect and learn together

Annual Celebration
Roundtable
Discussion topic: involving others in community building
Reflecting on need and intentions

Celebration open floor and panel discussions:
What should we work toward?
What should we do about it?

- Eric Doll, former intern and landscape architect
- Glen Markley of Rolfe Iowa
Impacts on planning and approval process

Program Evaluation
Chief Landscape Architect, Mark Masteller, Iowa DOT
Reflections of designers

Program Interviews
• Eric Becker, first year
• Dylan Jones, fourth year of service as a designer
M. Keen definition: “A process of iterative reflection that occurs when we share our experiences, ideas, and environments with others.” Loops are used to explain deepening experiential learning.

Example of “Learning Loops” to explain experiential learning of designer

- **Governance**: Fixing errors from routines
  - Single Loop Learning
  - “I’ll improve my graphics”

- **Intention**: Correcting errors by adjusting values and policies
  - Double Loop Learning

- **Action**: Correcting errors by designing governance norms and protocols
  - Triple Loop Learning

- **Outcomes**: Different types of graphics support different ways of knowing. We should employ graphic methods for particular purposes.

Graphics should be used early to synthesize technical information so people can grasp storm-water concepts.
“It feels like it’s a nice way to give back. I learn as much from the interns as they learn from me. I wish I had an opportunity to be a part of a process like this when I went to school."
“The charrette spurred great discussion on design ideas and concepts. [It] also allowed for people to show creativity and think outside the box.”
“If you mean the value on our normal charge rate and include time at training and the celebration, plus time not actually charged, ... the [market value] is at least twice what is received. It’s the value of the benefit that makes it worthwhile, in my opinion.”
Web of Service

Practitioners gain skill and insight that equip them collaborate in creating positive change with residents and other service providers.