



Creating Change.

OUR WORK, OUR IMPACT.



The Hub: Our Work and Its Impact

examines the concrete gains and real achievements made possible by the unique and vital role The Hub has played in West Virginia since 2008.

Since that foundation year, the network of community development organizations and supporters across counties and sectors has grown and become more diverse, inspired by a number of key successes and motivational challenges, and encouraged by the constant networking and collaboration activity of The Hub.

As this report will show, the level of collaboration in the state has significantly increased, resulting in many positive outcomes.

This report explores each of The Hub's four approaches to community development.

Chapter 1: Increasing Local Capacity (page 4) examines our work with communities of place, which was at the heart of The Hub's work primarily in our early years. Blueprint Communities, HubCAP and Turn This Town Around are examples of this approach.

Chapter 2: Convening Communities of Interest (page 15) examines The Hub approach that inspired the creation of the WV Food & Farm Coalition, the Abandoned Property Coalition and the WV Physical Activity Network. This approach grew out of our work with communities of place, which identified commonalities that needed to be addressed at a statewide level.

Chapter 3: Policy Change to Enable Change in Communities (page 29) explores the third approach, which became apparent through our work with both communities of place and communities of interest. Achieving positive change in our communities works best if it is accompanied by policy change. In the last two years, the Hub and our many partners have successfully pushed through 17 pieces of legislation and regulatory change that have had positive impacts on communities and families.



Chapter 4: Strategic Network Communications (page 37) examines our fourth, and newest, approach. The Hub is a small organization, with limited capacity. Our ability to create a communications infrastructure that serves the network as a whole is the most effective way to amplify our impact, share successes and bring more decision makers into this work. That work has already begun, and will expand dramatically as the State of Our Communities Report realizes its ambitious vision in the fall of 2015 and the years ahead.

In this report, we will explore the work being done through each of those approaches, share illuminating stories and present quantitative evidence of impact where possible.

Importantly, we will use what we have learned to inform where The Hub and the network might focus going forward.

Chapter 5: Changing The Future of WV (page 45) provides the beginnings of a strategic direction to help funders and investors identify how their resources can have the greatest impact, and help us collectively chart a course for future community development objectives, activities and projects.

Of course, this report is just one invitation to our funders and supporters to peer inside the inner workings of The Hub and examine the impact of our day-to-day activities. That invitation is always extended. If anything you read in the pages to follow piques your interest, I invite you to pick up the phone and get in touch. Our door is always open."

Kent Spellman

Kent Spellman ►
Executive Director
August, 2015



FOR MANY YEARS, INITIATIVES HAD FALLEN ON BARREN GROUND IN GRAFTON. THE HUB FINALLY GAINED A FOOTHOLD WITH TURN THIS TOWN AROUND



SCHEDULE

meet for Play in a Day
in presentation at M3M Bank

Dedication Ceremony for the new
of the building

Performs at local hall

and Kaiti's opening
at Gallery 62 West

He and guest professional makeup
on the floor

"As I have watched the communities

we work with over the last year and a half, the places that have seen the most success are the communities that understand "capacity building" and the importance of the role it plays in community development. It is the foundation of so much of the progress our communities make toward their own economic and social goals.

Yes, there is a lot of fancy jargon and shiny new tools that attach themselves to the concept of local capacity building, but in the end it is all about building relationships among the people that live in the community.

We have watched Buckhannon, one of our HubCAP communities, increase their capacity over the last five years through the work of the Create Buckhannon group.

The same momentum can be seen in Grafton, a 2014 Turn This Town Around community, that has seen enormous gains and concrete improvements over the last year, thanks largely to the civic infrastructure of All Aboard Grafton and the new local leaders it has nurtured.

By building local capacity in these places, The Hub has helped new leaders emerge, and increased engagement across entire communities."

Amanda Yager

Amanda Yager ►

Director of Community Strategies





SINCE THE LAUNCH OF NEW HISTORIC THOMAS AND THE RESULTING COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES, THOMAS HAS SEEN:

- ▶ 29 NEW JOBS CREATED, MANY AT THE OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT LEVEL
- ▶ 8,000+ SQUARE FEET OF DOWNTOWN SPACE REDEVELOPED
- ▶ \$266,500 IN SMALL BUSINESS LOANS (11 LOANS) THROUGH WOODLANDS COMMUNITY LENDERS
- ▶ 100% BUSINESS OCCUPANCY RATE ON MAIN STREET (EAST AVE.)

THOMAS

Local organization, a foundation for future success

The Hub is not responsible for the remarkable community development story that is Thomas. Credit for that goes largely to a perfect storm of ingredients: a few new citizens with money and energy to invest; a convergence of interest in music, art and outdoor recreation tourism; and a good location.

But what The Hub's work in Thomas in 2011 and 2012 did highlight is the fact that unless work is done to create the necessary civic infrastructure, even the ripest seeds of investment will fall on barren ground. Thanks to 12 months of community organizing, capacity building and visioning work facilitated by The Hub, when the perfect storm came to Thomas the town was ready to take advantage of it.

In 2011, The Hub was hired by Woodlands Development Group to help Thomas address a growing problem of dilapidated buildings in the area. Thanks to the experience of The Hub and our community coach working in Thomas, Josie Cuda, it became apparent that dilapidated buildings were just a single element of a bigger development need which also included finding new businesses to occupy restored buildings, creating appealing public spaces for locals and visitors, coordinating local community development efforts and gaining access to resources that were already out there.

This was work The Hub was uniquely placed to carry out.

Over the course of a year, Cuda and The Hub brought the people of Thomas together into working groups behind the issues that were of concern to them, and managed a visioning process to help the town provide direction and development strategy.

Supported by technical assistance from The Hub, about \$15,000 in grants was secured to provide local fundraising support, and to begin environmental surveying work of a 15-acre property that locals were eager to convert into a public greenspace.

But perhaps the most lasting impact of The Hub's work in Thomas was the re-launch of the then-dormant local community development nonprofit, New Historic Thomas. Emerging directly from the leadership committee formed by Cuda during the town's visioning process, New Historic Thomas now provides the civic structure and local organization necessary to ensure that the new energy and interest in Thomas receives the support and direction it requires.

The organization's achievements since relaunching in 2012 are many and varied, and range from acquiring historic district status for downtown Thomas, to improving city sidewalks and purchasing picnic tables for the Thomas Riverfront Park.

"The Hub was there at the critical moment," says Cuda. "Getting all these people together in a structured way and getting them moving in the right direction was the spark they needed."

GRAFTON

When the community is ready, The Hub is ready

Chances are, if you were to peek behind the curtain of any of the new public initiatives that have taken off in Grafton over the past few years you would find a group of local citizens known as All Aboard Grafton.

During Grafton's Turn This Town Around efforts of 2014, Hub staff identified the creation of an organized civic conversation group as a key to continued development in the city, and so we provided the technical assistance needed to get that up and running.

Weekly All Aboard Grafton discussion meetings, modeled after another Hub protégé, Create Buckhannon, began to bear fruit almost immediately. Local beautification projects, a new twice-weekly farmers market, and the launch of an extended shopping evening with live music, street food and pop-up entertainment on the First Friday of each month cemented All Aboard Grafton's local reputation as a group that produces real results.

But it was the remarkable success of All Aboard Grafton's Main Street Deck project that demonstrated the development potential of creating a regular forum for organized collaboration and community planning.

Kickstarted by a \$2,500 Turn This Town Around mini-grant courtesy of the Benedum Foundation, the local campaign to create the Main Street performance and event space attracted more than \$60,000 in public and private funding, including \$40,000 from a local mining company, and \$10,000 from the City of Grafton. These were investments that would not have been leveraged without the civic infrastructure and planning coordination of All Aboard Grafton.

But this was not an overnight success.

For many years, various community development initiatives had fallen on barren ground in Grafton. The Hub finally gained a foothold in the community with Turn This Town Around, a connection made possible thanks to the Hub's flexibility, persistence and eagerness to be guided by local priorities and opportunities. In 2015, Hub staff continued to provide assistance and support to Grafton's community development work, though the recent locally driven successes of All Aboard Grafton indicate that, happily, the need for that external support will likely to diminish in the months ahead.



**\$2,500 MINI-GRANT
LEVERAGED INTO
\$60,000
PUBLIC/PRIVATE
INVESTMENT IN
MAIN STREET DECK.**

THE WV HUB

Increasing Local Capacity



PRINCETON HAS
INVESTED \$86,000 &

1200
VOLUNTEER
HOURS

INTO ART PROJECTS &
BEAUTIFICATION

Princeton

The right support for a great idea

Princeton has created the blueprint for places all over West Virginia in terms of how art can be the direct driver of economic and community development efforts.

In fact, it was The Hub's Blueprint program that led directly to the launch of the Princeton Renaissance Project, a broad-based local revitalization effort targeted at creating an attractive, economically vibrant downtown that fosters community activity and drives commercial and residential investment.

In just five years, this organized community development effort has:

- ▶ leveraged more than \$200,000 worth of investment in the acquisition and renovation of the historic Lavon Theater,
- ▶ used public art works to dramatically improve the appearance of the downtown area,
- ▶ overseen the purchase of six previously vacant downtown buildings,
- ▶ sourced thousands of dollars' worth of investment in downtown beautification works, and
- ▶ launched two major downtown events—the Mercer Monster Mash Halloween Spectacular and The Downtown Countdown New Year's Eve Celebration.

With all that positive downtown activity, new business investment has quickly followed. Seven new businesses have opened in Princeton since 2012, including a Montessori preschool, a coffee shop, an art gallery and art education center, a florist, a beauty salon and a monogramming and decal business. And several entrepreneurs are currently exploring local sites for new restaurants.

But it is the way that The Hub connected Princeton to the Blueprint opportunity that is most telling about the style and effectiveness of The Hub's approach.

"A lot of organizations are willing to speak in support of our efforts, but one of the things we needed was real opportunities to work and sustain our efforts here," says Lori McKinney, co-founder of the RiffRaff Arts Collective and an early architect of the Princeton Renaissance Project. "Through bringing Princeton in to their expansive network, and by staying in touch and constantly opening the door to new opportunities, The Hub provided that.

"The Hub identified the great potential of our effort to center economic revitalization around the arts, and was then able to provide the technical assistance, the guidance and the resources over a number of years to help us make that real."



**7 THE NUMBER OF
NEW BUSINESSES
IN PRINCETON'S
DOWNTOWN
SINCE 2012**

THE PRINCETON RENAISSANCE PROJECT SPURRED A REVITALIZATION THAT RESULTED IN MILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF INVESTMENT IN PRINCETON'S DOWNTOWN, MOST OF IT PRIVATE MONEY.

SINCE 2012:

- ▶ 7 NEW BUSINESSES CREATED
- ▶ 6 PREVIOUSLY UNDERUTILIZED BUILDINGS PURCHASED
- ▶ 2 NEW MAJOR PUBLIC EVENTS
- ▶ \$200,000 IN PUBLIC/PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN LAVON THEATER RENOVATION



CREATE BUCKHANNON
HAS ENGAGED
500+
BUCKHANNONITES
IN THE GOVERNANCE
AND DEVELOPMENT
OF THEIR CITY

BUCKHANNON

Channeling local energy into local results

The Hub's work in Buckhannon is the story of applying proven tools and strategies to help communities move from broad aspirations to specific deliverables.

When The Hub first connected with Buckhannon in 2010, the civic infrastructure was already in place. After a turbulent few years, involving lawsuits against the city and a breakdown in municipal relationships, a group of civic leaders calling themselves Create Buckhannon had created a vibrant, ongoing community conversation held every week in a local restaurant.

But it was the HubCAP program that gave the people of Buckhannon the tools they needed to channel the established civic infrastructure into coordinated, strategic community development gains.

"One of the most valuable things about The Hub's involvement was that it connected us to what all these other communities were doing," says C.J. Rylands, a local business owner and one of the co-founders of Create Buckhannon. "Community development is pure theft. If you see something working somewhere else, you try to emulate it. Before The Hub came along, we were operating without that network, or the coaching and resources to help us put all these concepts into real practice."

Among their dozens of achievements, Create Buckhannon has:

- ▶ developed the initial 2015 City of Buckhannon Long Range Comprehensive Plan;
- ▶ secured the funding and helped coordinate the development of Jawbone Park; and
- ▶ launched Festival Fridays, a weekly main street event from May through September featuring live music, crafts, food vendors and local businesses.

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"ONE OF THE MOST VALUABLE THINGS ABOUT THE HUB'S INVOLVEMENT WAS THAT IT CONNECTED US TO WHAT ALL THESE OTHER COMMUNITIES WERE DOING"





WHITESVILLE WAS THE RECIPIENT OF A \$10,000 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANT TO TRACK DOWN BUILDING OWNERS AND EXAMINE OPTIONS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENT

WHITESVILLE

Connecting communities with a world of opportunity

The story of how the small town of Whitesville came to receive a \$10,000 technical assistance grant to address the problem of its dilapidated buildings offers an illuminating insight into why The Hub is so valued by the communities and sectors we support.

In January 2015, The Hub began working to stimulate local development initiatives in Whitesville, part of the second iteration of the Turn This Town Around program.

Our Turn This Town Around work in Whitesville centered around two key deliverables:

1. Guiding a visioning process for the town to identify and document its local priorities,
2. Identifying and nurturing local leadership and structured support behind those priorities.

In a series of meetings with the people of Whitesville throughout the winter, it emerged that abandoned and blighted buildings were at the top of that list.

At the same time, hundreds of miles away in the north of the state, The Hub was working with the Brownfields Assistance Center (BAC) at West Virginia University to solicit applications for their BAD Buildings Technical Assistance Grants.

The BAC was looking for those communities that were both eager and ready to make best use of technical assistance to take the initial steps toward improving dilapidated buildings, such as forming a local action committee, conducting surveying and research work, and examining redevelopment opportunities.

News of the BAD Buildings grants had not reached the people of Whitesville, but it had reached The Hub.

Playing the vital role of resource link, our staff worked with the local leadership we had identified as part of Turn This Town Around and used the Turn This Town Around meeting infrastructure to form a working committee, and notified BAC of an ideal candidate.

As a result, Whitesville was the recipient of a \$10,000 technical assistance grant and work is already underway—driven by a local working committee—on tracking down building owners and examining options for immediate improvement.



BEFORE A SINGLE DOLLAR OF MINI-GRANT FUNDING WAS MADE AVAILABLE, IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2015 THE PEOPLE OF WHITESVILLE RAISED \$14,000 TO SUPPORT TURN THIS TOWN AROUND PROJECTS.

A black and white photograph of a three-story brick building facade. The building features large, multi-paned windows on the upper floors and a ground-floor storefront with large display windows and double doors. The name "VALENTINE, NEWCOMB & CARTER" is inscribed in large, raised letters above the ground-floor windows. Decorative architectural elements include a cornice with a repeating circular motif and small circular ornaments between the window rows. A small sign on the left corner of the building reads "FIVE".

THE ABANDONED
PROPERTIES COALITION
ACTIVATED
AN EXPANSIVE
NETWORK
OF ALL RELEVANT
STATE AGENCIES AND
ORGANIZATIONS.

"The history of West Virginia has not been traditionally rooted in collaboration and joint action.

Separated by topography, socio-economic status, cultural differences, and geographically apart from the outside world, West Virginians have had to work hard and do whatever it took to survive because there was no other choice.

West Virginians (and the rest of rural Appalachia) should be proud of their tenacity and their ability to survive the past 152 years of statehood, but should also understand that times have changed and in order to continue to endure we must adapt.

In today's world, the economic health of communities requires us to come together to compete in a new global market. Our success moving forward depends on our willingness to come together and work toward a better future for all of West Virginia regardless of political boundaries.

The Hub's focus on coalition building has been tremendously effective in breaking down historic barriers to unearth the true power of West Virginia's communities. By aligning strategic partners with common interests in healthy food, agricultural development, blight eradication and uplifting the lives of our children, The Hub has helped define a blueprint for a new West Virginia.

It is a blueprint built on a strong, independent spirit that works collectively for the good of all Appalachia."

Katherine S Wyrosdick

Katherine S Wyrosdick, AICP ►
Director of Planning, Erie County, Pa.,
and Hub Board Member



THE 2014 BAD BUILDINGS SUMMIT PROVIDED TRAINING AND ACTIONABLE RESOURCES FOR 11 COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE STATE

Abandoned Properties Coalition: Leading a coordinated response

Abandoned and dilapidated buildings are a problem in almost every community in West Virginia. And it is a problem that plagues these communities in many different forms, from discouraging new investment and new residents to decreasing civic involvement and community pride.

But despite the many-faceted problem and its wide-reaching impact, prior to 2012 there was no organized coalition working to provide resources and create new solutions to address the issue.

But in 2012 The Hub came to realize the tremendous energy that had grown around its dilapidated buildings toolkit—developed thanks to a Flex-E-Grant funded by ARC and the Benedum Foundation—and the BAD Building program, developed in conjunction with the Northern Brownfields Assistance Center.

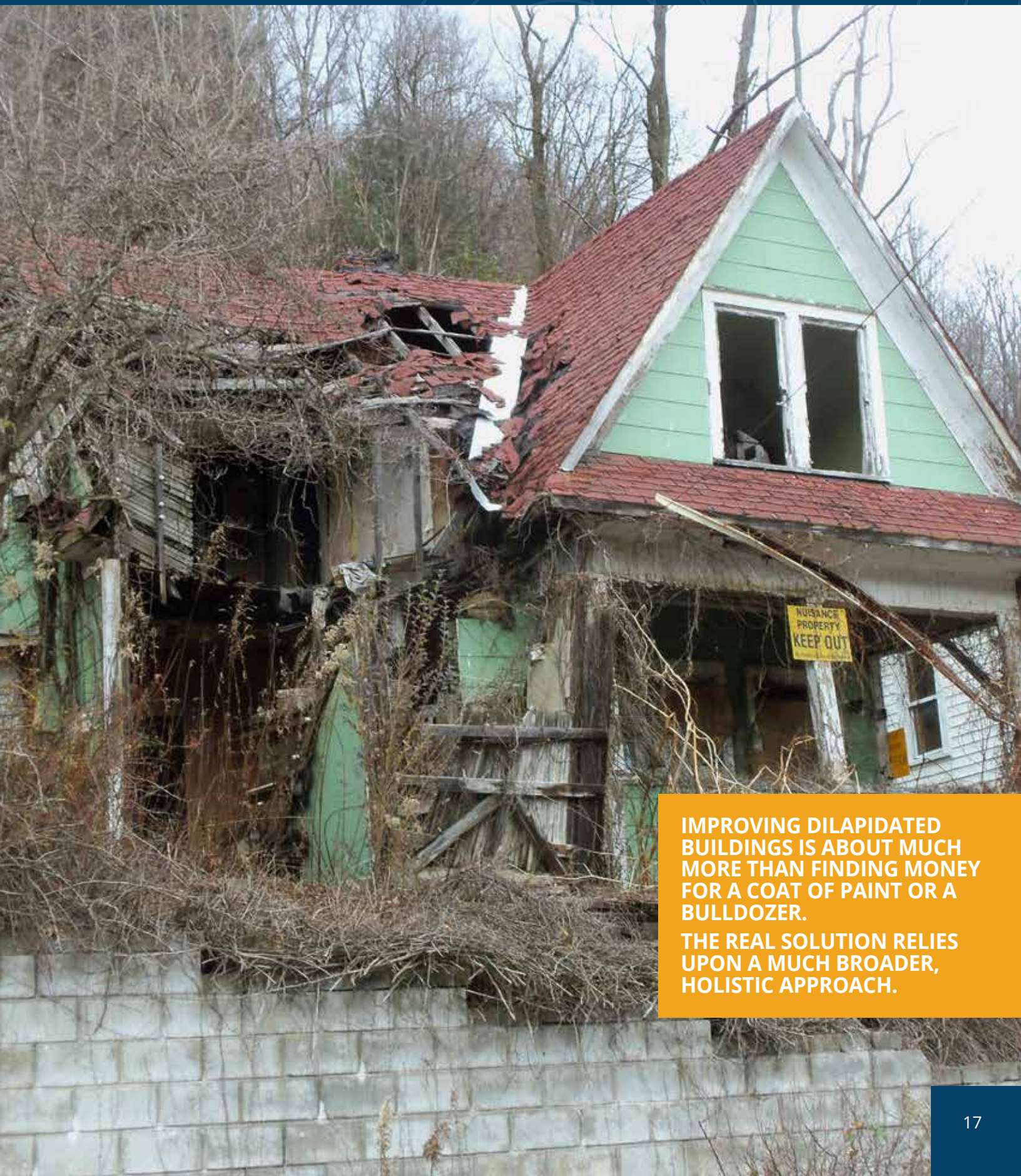
The Hub's work on the ground in those early days, in places like Thomas and Richwood, taught us that improving dilapidated buildings is about much more than finding money for a coat of paint or a bulldozer. We saw that the real solution relies on a much broader, holistic approach that includes developing business strategies for site reuse; helping municipalities with zoning, code and enforcement; and empowering locals to be the first step in a long process that starts with surveying, contacting landowners, and identifying creative opportunities that make sense for their community.

The real solution required that a number of organizations come together to work in concert. And so in 2012, The Hub formed the Abandoned Properties Coalition (APC), activating our expansive network to bring to the table all the relevant state agencies and organizations to provide resources and information for landowners and communities. That included advocating for policy solutions, coordinating research and surveying activity, and providing training and technical advice for addressing local dilapidated structures.

Hands-on help, where it was needed.

Since 2012, the APC has doubled the number of member organizations. In addition to the convening role played by The Hub, the coalition now

**THE APC HAS
DOUBLED
IN MEMBERS SINCE 2012**



IMPROVING DILAPIDATED BUILDINGS IS ABOUT MUCH MORE THAN FINDING MONEY FOR A COAT OF PAINT OR A BULLDOZER.

THE REAL SOLUTION RELIES UPON A MUCH BROADER, HOLISTIC APPROACH.



EVERYONE—FROM U.S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE REPRESENTATIVES TO LOCAL FARMERS AND TEACHERS—JOINED TOGETHER TO FORM WORKING GROUPS AROUND THE MOST PRESSING ISSUES

includes the Northern Brownfields Assistance Center, Coalfield Development Corporation, Center for Community Progress, WVU Land Use Clinic, Huntington Urban Renewal Authority, Edward Tucker Architects, Preservation Alliance of WV, The Ross Foundation, Main Street WV, New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, Fayette County Commission and the City of Fairmont.

With so much new energy and capacity dedicated to the issue, important gains have been realized. In 2013, the APC was invited to present before an interim committee of the West Virginia State Legislature; policy solutions were proposed and secured in 2014 and 2015; and in 2014 a greatly expanded BAD Buildings Summit provided training and actionable resources for 11 communities across the state looking to address dilapidated buildings.

Recently, the State Legislature's Joint Committee on Government Organization asked The Hub to head the development of dilapidated property policy recommendations for them to consider in preparation for the 2016 Legislative Session.

AVERAGE GROSS SALES PER FARMERS MARKET



Come to the table: Building a force behind WV's food and farm economy

The work that would eventually lead to the creation of the West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition and the resulting growth of West Virginia's food and farm economy, started back in 2009.

During a Hub listening tour of more than 20 communities across the state that year, two issues consistently rose to the top of the list of local concerns: what to do about dilapidated and abandoned buildings, and how to boost the local production and consumption of healthy food.

What happened next concerning the dilapidated buildings story is told elsewhere in this report. To address the second item, The Hub saw a tremendous opportunity to apply one of the core tenets of our work and convene all interested parties to try to shape common goals and challenges as the first step to creating a more robust organizational structure.

In 2010, that process involved bringing more than 300 people from dozens of organizations to the table—everyone from U.S. Dept. of Agriculture representatives to local farmers and teachers—forming working groups around the most pressing issues, and building a basic but very valuable network for information sharing and communication.

Still, more was needed.

"WE NEEDED TO BUILD A MORE FOCUSED ORGANIZATION THAT WAS STAKEHOLDER DRIVEN AND THAT HAD A CLEAR VISION."

"I remember, back then, we made a presentation to the [State] Joint Committee on Agriculture and Agri-business, and it was immediately clear that there was not a lot of interest from legislators and that a lot of education was needed," says Savanna Lyons, who would become the founding executive director of the West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition (WVFFC). "They just didn't know what the issues were, who the stakeholders were. We needed to build a more focused organization that was stakeholder driven and that had a clear vision."

Funded by a grant from The Benedum Foundation, Lyons was hired in the summer of 2010 to help create the WVFFC, and this investment in a dedicated staff person soon paid dividends.

Listening sessions and conversations now became focused working groups and action items. Training was held, processors shared resources and advice, market opportunities were studied, and a loose and intangible bracket of businesses became a solid sector coalition that provided real value for its members. Importantly, it now had the weight to bring about the market and policy improvements that were needed to boost the industry.

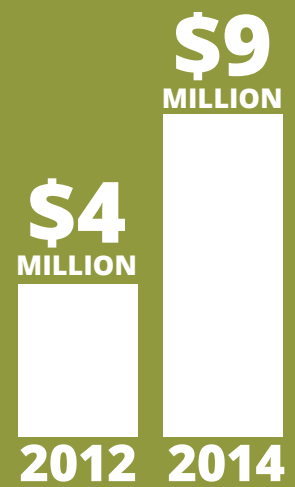
"It turns out that what was really valuable for producers and everyone else was that they now had someone to call," Lyons says. "Sometimes you need someone there to pick up the phone and connect two people or five people or 20 people with the ideas or resources or events they needed. The Hub and Benedum Foundation made that possible by focusing on building a structure, and recognizing what is created through networking and capacity building. In real terms, it boosted collaboration immensely, and turned all this into one big, robust system."

Thanks to strong leadership, the newly created coalition was soon able to produce a focused and identifiable list of priorities they wanted to address, including education for young people, improvements to meat processing regulations, and streamlining aggregation and distribution systems. The WVFFC responded with training sessions, such as the statewide school gardens event in 2013 that attracted more than 50 schools, and transformative policy solutions, which are explored in Chapter 4.

One of the priority issues that emerged during this process was building a stronger farmers market economy across the state. And so, once the WVFFC was up and running, leadership turned its attention to revamping the under-resourced West Virginia Farmers Market Association (WVFMA). That work, by Hub and WVFFC staff, included restructuring the board and organizational mission statement, and creating a new strategic direction.



**TOTAL DIRECT SALES IN
WV FARMERS MARKETS**





TENS OF MILLIONS
OF DOLLARS WAS LOST
TO OTHER STATES,
WHERE, COORDINATED
BY STATE OFFICIALS
AND DEPARTMENTS,
STRATEGIC GRANT
APPLICATIONS WERE
BEING AWARDED. AND
SO, IN 2015, THE HUB
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Thanks again to an investment from the Benedum Foundation, the first paid executive director of the WVFMA began work in 2013, and immediately set about creating a training program for farmers market vendors, and conducting promotional and marketing campaigns to boost the profile of farmers markets to consumers.

More concrete gains soon followed. Having tried unsuccessfully since 2006 to provide insurance coverage for market vendors, the new WVFMA was able to achieve that goal in 2014.

The impact of the creation of the WVFFC, and the rejuvenation of the WVFMA, is evident in the significant growth of economic activity in the sector in recent years.

When leadership is needed: Bringing POWER to West Virginia

In 2014 and 2015, the state governments representing coal communities across America began organizing their regional business and community leaders to take advantage of the federal government's POWER Initiative, a competitive pool of grant funding to help develop new economic opportunities for areas impacted by the decline of the coal industry. Except West Virginia.

Lacking the necessary political will or organizational vision, the State of West Virginia declined to undertake the necessary coordinating effort to explore federal funding opportunities for the state's next generation of employers and revenue generators. And so tens of millions of dollars was lost to other states, where, coordinated by state officials and departments, strategic grant applications were being awarded. And so, in 2015, The Hub stepped into the void.

Having been involved with the State of Kentucky's proactive organizing effort around POWER opportunities, The Hub's Director of Community Engagement & Policy, Stephanie Tyree, returned to West Virginia with a plan to provide the same competitive assistance to industry here.

That required convening all relevant stakeholders, calling on The Hub's unparalleled regional network and relationships forged over many years. Filling the role vacated by official state leadership, The Hub convened a group of 106 industry and community leaders focused around the southern coalfields for a number of phone and email organizing sessions in the winter

**HAVING TRIED
UNSUCCESSFULLY
SINCE 2006 TO PROVIDE
INSURANCE COVERAGE
FOR MARKET VENDORS,
THE NEW WVFMA WAS
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GOAL IN 2014.**



and spring of 2015. That remarkable cross-sector network extended to the White House itself.

In 2014, The Hub was introduced to White House senior staff through its connection with the Appalachian Regional Commission and our work to address dilapidated buildings across the state. It is a relationship we continue to nurture.

The tremendous strength of The Hub's network paid significant dividends when we arranged for the White House's POWER Initiative leads and representatives from numerous federal agencies to lead a POWER information session and collaboration event in Fayette County.

The Hub bolstered this convening activity by building the only comprehensive online portal for POWER information and resources. And, thanks to continued advocacy and coordination by The Hub, the U.S. Economic Development Administration returned to West Virginia in August to conduct technical assistance training for prospective grant applicants.

It is too soon to assess the impact of that event, and the broader convening role The Hub has taken to help West Virginia communities and industry leaders find support for their economic transition ambitions. But we do know that, as a direct result of this convening work, strategic, collaborative grant applications are now being developed. Where before there existed a vacuum of regional industry leadership and coordination, there is now organization, vision, information and hope.

Reversing the downward spiral of downtown West Virginia

Over the past few years, The Hub and The Benedum Foundation have been at the center of revolutionizing the way West Virginia has attempted to address its problems of abandoned and blighted downtown properties.

By 2011, the continued neglect of downtown buildings in communities across the state created a great sense of urgency among all stakeholders—from local residents to state economic agencies and private industry.

That was the year The Hub played a central role in convening a groundbreaking meeting of these diverse stakeholders at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development office in Morgantown. It wasn't known it at the time, but this meeting was the genesis of what would later be known as Downtown Appalachia.



**"DOWNTOWN
DEVELOPMENT IS
AT THE CORE OF
BRINGING THESE
COMMUNITIES BACK,"**



SINCE 2012, THE SUCCESS OF THE HUB'S STRATEGY HAS MANIFESTED ITSELF IN NEW COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES OCCUPYING REDEVELOPED DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS IN

- ▶ GRAFTON
- ▶ PRINCETON
- ▶ THOMAS
- ▶ HUNTINGTON
- ▶ BUCKHANNON
- ▶ CLARKSBURG
- ▶ HINTON
- ▶ MATEWAN

At that meeting, and in subsequent meetings of the group, it became evident that the piecemeal, disjointed approach to rehabilitation of downtown buildings was not addressing the issue at its roots, nor was it an effective use of the limited funds available.

"It was The Hub that promoted the concept that you have to match your investment and energy with the communities that are the most prepared," says Patrick Kirby, Director of the Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center. "So we created a grid of where we had already done local capacity building work through programs like HubCap, FOCUS WV Brownfields, Blueprint and First Impressions. When we looked at the conditions in each of these communities, in terms of capacity, organization and planning, we knew that these would be the places where we would have the most impact, because they were prepared."

What these communities were also able to provide was some idea of what productive uses could be made of redeveloped properties. With funders becoming concerned that abandoned buildings had the potential to become a financial black hole, options for "end use" of targeted properties became a much greater focus. That revolution of strategy was made possible only by bringing divergent voices and expertise to the table.

The remarkable achievement of this coalition is that West Virginia's communities now have access to the resources and support they need to address their abandoned properties by doing more than facade improvement or demolition, including studying practical reuse strategies, options for deal structuring, implementation of redevelopment plans, small business recruitment and entrepreneurship training.

Since 2012, the success of this strategy has manifested itself in new commercial enterprises occupying redeveloped downtown buildings in Grafton, Princeton, Thomas, Huntington, Buckhannon, Clarksburg, Hinton and Matewan.

"Downtown development is at the core of bringing these communities back," Kirby says. "We have to rebuild coal-impacted communities from the inside out, by providing training and business coaching, and finding profitable ways to repurpose the assets we have. Only this model will drive additional, sustainable investment."



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AT THE LEVEL OF
POLICY CHANGE



As The Hub deepened its work in communities across the state, identifying local leadership and helping those leaders promote community development, roadblocks kept emerging that would divert local attention, resources and effectiveness.

The Hub's vantage as a statewide organization working in dozens of small communities gave us a unique perspective from which we could see that these roadblocks were happening in every community. And, critically, they were the same roadblocks.

It became clear that community development could only be catalyzed effectively if there was a mechanism to address these identical, statewide challenges at the system-level: at the level of policy change.

So in 2012, The Hub took on this role, and I was hired as the Director of Community Engagement and Policy. True to the theme of all our work, our goal was to provide processes and mechanisms for communities to more effectively achieve their locally identified development goals. Transferring this approach to policy, we built a process to engage communities in policy decision-making and to bring their voices, ideas and concerns to the State Legislature in a coordinated, strategic way.

First, we educate communities about what policy is, how it relates to their efforts, and what is at stake for communities who are not engaged in the policy decision-making system.

Second, we coordinate communities of interest to build policy coalitions. We sometimes directly coordinate these coalitions but, more frequently, we help sector-based organizations develop their own community-based policy programs.

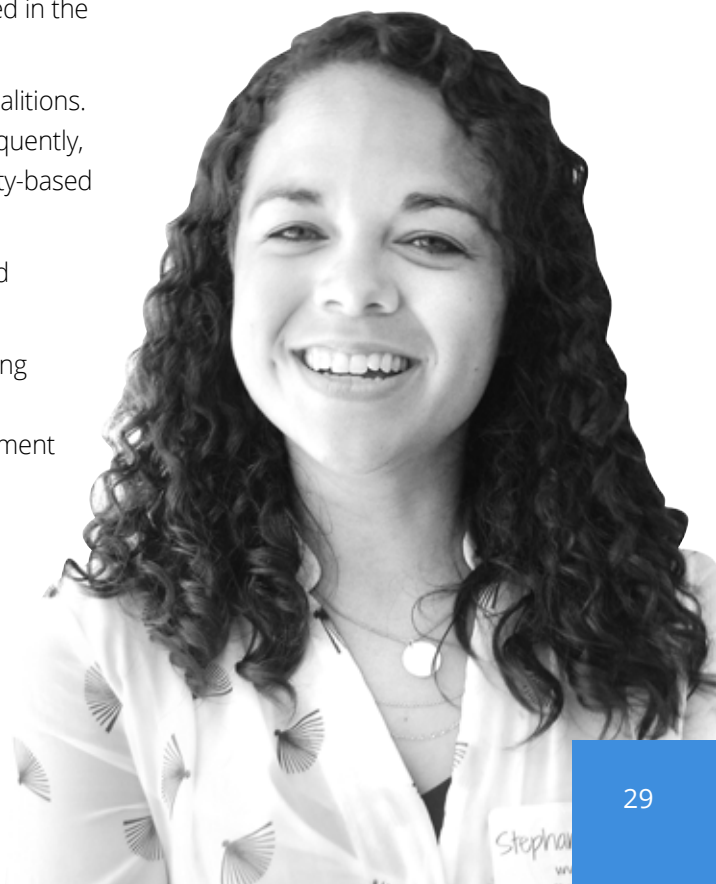
Our third role is as a catalyzer and convener of community-based policy initiatives and coalitions.

The core concepts behind each of these roles is education, training and empowerment. What they have produced is, with limited dedicated policy capacity, an outsized impact on political engagement in support of community development in West Virginia.

Stephanie Tyree

Stephanie Tyree ►

Director of Community Engagement & Policy



Our Children, Our Future: Policy change on front line of battle against child poverty

The story of the Our Children, Our Future campaign demonstrates the powerful impact on policy one can have by forming a broad coalition around an issue.

The Hub was a founding member of the Our Children, Our Future campaign in 2012, and since then has led the campaign's efforts to inspire and organize grassroots advocates behind legislative solutions to ending child poverty in West Virginia.

Since 2012, as the prime organizer of regional policy workshops across the state, The Hub has trained more than 1,200 West Virginians to become advocates for issues vital to the wellbeing of children and families, a process that has already had an outsized impact on the state.

In its first three years, the Our Children, Our Future campaign process has resulted in 18 new pieces of legislation to make West Virginia's families healthier, safer and more prosperous. These significant victories include:

- ▶ **Medicaid Expansion**—providing health insurance for 150,000 working West Virginians
- ▶ **Minimum wage raised to \$8.75**
- ▶ **Future Fund Act**—creating endowment for state investments through natural gas tax
- ▶ **Stopping budget cuts to child care programs** three years in a row
- ▶ **Feed to Achieve Act**—expanding school breakfast and lunch programs
- ▶ **Juvenile Justice reform**—reducing child incarceration by changing truancy laws
- ▶ **Pregnant workers fairness act passed**—providing seating and breaks to pregnant workers
- ▶ **Move to Improve**—making sure kids get 30 minutes of physical activity every day at school

With just one staff member dedicated to policy and political engagement work, The Hub has been able to leverage a massive impact by staying true to the core tenets of the organization— education and empowerment.

By helping West Virginians understand the political process, identifying for them the opportunities they have to influence that process and educating them on the mechanisms and strategies to do it, The Hub continues to build a sustainable increase in access to democracy in West Virginia, while also maintaining a nonpartisan stance on divisive issues.



**18 NEW
PIECES
OF LEGISLATION
HAS BEEN CREATED
THROUGH THE HUB'S
OUR CHILDREN,
OUR FUTURE PROCESS**

Food and Farm Policy: Creating the framework for a new economy

The launch of the West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition (WVFFC) and the regeneration of the West Virginia Farmers Market Association (WVFMA) immediately created a coordinated body with the ability to influence state policies related to the food and agriculture sector.

Identifying the enormous community development opportunities inherent in the food economy, The Hub provided the legal and policy expertise to enable the WVFFC to create an organizational policy structure, conducted in-person policy and advocacy training for food and agriculture working groups, coordinated sector lobby days, and translated on-the-ground challenges for producers and consumers into real legislation and policy improvements.

The Hub believes the best approach to policy work involves first doing a lot of listening. And since 2013 we have dedicated many hours of staff time to holding listening sessions and organized policy forums in order to unearth the sector challenges most ripe for addressing through the legislature.

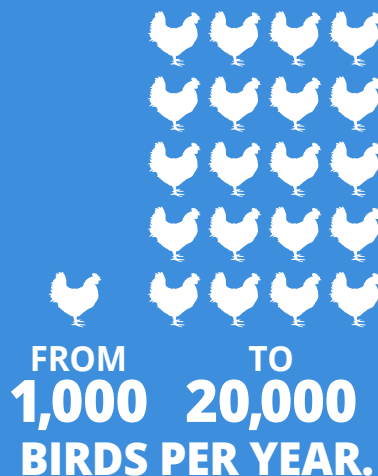
This powerful “bubble up” approach led directly to the passage of four new state laws that have resulted in a significant boost to members of the WVFFC, WVFMA and the food and agriculture sector as a whole.

The annual WVFFC policy advocacy training sessions held by the WVFFC and The Hub created a process for the sector to identify and prioritize policy opportunities, engage all stakeholders in policy decision-making, and bring together community members and legislators to identify local food policy priorities.

In the past two years, The Hub and our partners have passed four new laws that directly created new business opportunities for the sector by expanding on-farm poultry slaughtering, allowing on-farm rabbit slaughtering, creating a single statewide farmers market permit and allowing for the creation of local food cooperative businesses.

Additionally, as a direct result of this successful work, The Hub, WVFFC and the WVFMA have seen a marked increase in engagement with the WV Dept. of Agriculture, who now call upon these sector leaders as policy development partners who represent the concerns of farmers, producers and other stakeholders.

NEW POULTRY PROCESSING REGS GREW PRODUCTION



IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, THE HUB AND OUR PARTNERS HAVE PASSED FOUR NEW LAWS THAT DIRECTLY CREATED NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE SECTOR.



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AND EMPOWERMENT

The fight against blight now has a policy champion

Since its launch in 2013, the coordinated voice and broad network generated by the creation of the Abandoned Properties Coalition (APC) has been a game-changer.

Right from the outset, the APC was focused on creating real action in the state legislature to address West Virginia's crisis of abandoned and blighted buildings. Its impact was almost immediate, when in that year the APC was invited to present before the Interim Committee on Government Organization, unveiling a priority list of policy solutions that would guide the APC and the legislature's response in the years ahead.

At the top of that list was the creation of a state land bank to allow municipalities to acquire abandoned properties and make them available for redevelopment. And in 2014, the passage of West Virginia Senate Bill 579 did just that, a measureable victory for the fledgling APC and clear evidence of the political momentum the coalition had fostered.

Since then, the APC's role as an authoritative policy partner for the legislature has grown. Again spearheaded by The Hub's policy staffer, Stephanie Tyree, in 2014 the coalition helped pass a bill to expand municipal authority to address dilapidated properties, and in 2015 worked with partner groups and the Senate Finance Chairman to research and begin drafting a revision of the state tax code.

The Hub and our partners in the APC have been asked by the state legislature's Joint Committee on Government Organization to put forward policy priorities for the 2016 session, opening the door to further policy gains by one of the state's newest, but most effective, sector collaborations.



Legislative Hubbub: Keeping citizens informed

The Hub takes very seriously the old adage that “information is power.”

Our work helping citizens have a greater say in the political process that governs them is centered on providing essential information, whether that be how to contact an elected representative, how to create and shape policies before they become law, or what the potential impact of new legislation may be on the community development sector in West Virginia.

This is especially important during the legislative session—January, February and March—during which time The Hub publishes its weekly e-newsletter, the Legislative Hubbub. A thorough examination of all legislative activity related to the community development ambitions of The Hub’s network, the Legislative Hubbub reached an online audience of more than 4,300 West Virginians in 2015. The publication provided them with information and analysis about the legislative session found nowhere else.

And that is a characteristic of The Hub’s policy work that has parallels all throughout the organization. Much like our ability to step into the leadership void that existed around the POWER Initiative, our provision of providing vital information during the legislative session is a result of The Hub having the flexibility, talent and vision to identify dark spots in the landscape where attention is needed.

**IN 2015, THE
LEGISLATIVE HUBBUB
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MORE THAN
4,300
WEST VIRGINIANS**



GENERATING UPWARDS OF 1,500 PAGE VIEWS PER WEEK DURING THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION, THE LEGISLATIVE HUBBUB IS HAVING AN UNDENIABLE IMPACT ON OUR AUDIENCE'S ABILITY TO HAVE A VOICE IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, BY KEEPING THEM ENGAGED AND INFORMED.

Produced weekly during the session, the Legislative Hubbub features not only expert analysis of new bills, but also empowers readers to get involved in the legislative process by providing information on how to follow bills online, when key votes will be held, which lawmakers could influence the passage of important legislation, and what opportunities exist for the general public to engage in the issues at hand.

We can tell by tracking our readership that the Legislative Hubbub is addressing a significant need. Generating upwards of 1,500 page views per week during the legislative session, the Legislative Hubbub is having an undeniable impact on our audience's ability to have a voice in the democratic process, by keeping them engaged and informed.

Policy of the People

The Hub is ambitious, and we are not satisfied with the number or diversity of people we have been able to engage with our various policy efforts to involve more citizens in the democratic process.

We want to break outside the bubble of our current audience and into the broader mainstream, using online platforms to revolutionize the way people are able to take part in vibrant policy conversations.

Blending policy and communications, Policy of the People is a branded promotional and engagement effort we are designing in 2015 and which we aim to begin using in 2016 to grow awareness of community development policy activity in West Virginia beyond our existing email and social media audiences.

Keep your eyes peeled; you'll soon be seeing Policy of the People promotional materials in your local coffee shop, bookstore, restaurant or community noticeboards.

**THE HUB IS
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unities.





IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2015, THE HUB HAS PROVIDED IN-PERSON TRAINING ON COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY AND PROCESS TO MORE THAN 590 PEOPLE ACROSS DOZENS OF ORGANIZATIONS IN WEST VIRGINIA.

"As The Hub's work grew from its early focus on local capacity to broader strategic initiatives across a range of communities and sectors, it became evident there was something missing that would enable The Hub to maximize the impact of all this work on a much broader scale. That something was communications.

I joined The Hub in 2015 as the organization's first Director of Network Communications. Far from being a typical public relations or media role serving The Hub, true to our style this position is about boosting the communications capacity of community development organizations right across the state.

As it pertains to The Hub's four approaches, the communications arm is less about external, public communications than about building a powerful network of information and resource sharing.

What that means is making sure success stories reach the audiences that can learn from them, that funding and collaboration opportunities find the right ears, and that all communications staff across the state are working together to share best practices, tips and training.

This is foundation building.

And it's work that is happening right now. (If you'd like to know more, I'd love to hear from you.) We expect it will have an outsized impact on the efficiency and profile of the West Virginia community development sector for decades to come."

Jake Lynch

Jake Lynch ►

Director of Network Communications



SINCE MARCH 2015,
THE HUB "HOW-TO"
RESOURCE PAGES
HAVE RECEIVED
**MORE
THAN
1,100**
UNIQUE PAGE VIEWS

The Listserv: Building a support network across the state

"Teach a man to fish..." is a worn metaphor but it runs through much of The Hub's work for the simple fact that it's effective.

A problem we identified in 2014 and have been able to address in 2015 is a lack of communications capacity and expertise across our network.

Few and far between are the West Virginia community development organizations that have their own dedicated communications staff, expertly trained and adequately equipped to handle internal and external communications, social media pages, PR and media outreach, web design and story creation.

The "at-the-coalface" reality is that the people doing this work are staff or volunteers whose expertise lies elsewhere, but they're doing the best they can with limited or no training.

So The Hub built a network to help them—the WV Communications Listserv—and in doing so has boosted the communications capacity of dozens of community development organizations across the state.

Created and managed by The Hub's Director of Network Communications, Jake Lynch, the WV Communications Listserv currently has 51 members, people of varying skills and strengths. The WV Communications Listserv exists purely for the benefit of its members, who ask and respond to questions and assistance requests about nuts and bolts communications issues in their workplace, such as tips on social media, affordable training events, recommendations on website developers, or how to write a good press release.

In the first few months of its existence, the WV Communications Listserv has provided direct benefits and has begun to fulfill its goal of boosting the communications capacity of organizations across the state in a cost-effective, efficient manner.

We believe the listserv's impact will continue to grow as it becomes more familiar across our network.

In-person and online training: Sharing proven strategies for communications success

In the first half of 2015, the Hub has provided direct in-person training on communications strategy and processes to more than 590 people across

dozens of organizations in West Virginia. Directly responding to requests from each organization, these training sessions have covered such pressing needs as:

- ▶ How to engage with the media
- ▶ How to build event registration web pages
- ▶ How Facebook can connect to organizational goals
- ▶ How to quickly and cheaply give your campaign a web presence
- ▶ Shortcuts to producing compelling stories

In addition to these in-person sessions, The Hub has worked hard to provide similar technical support to a bigger audience of people across the state by distilling these lessons into shareable digital resources—webpages and blog posts.

Since March 2015, The Hub's "how-to" resource pages have received more than 1,100 unique page views, greatly expanding the reach of our training sessions into a new, digitally connected, audience.

The next step is to build a one-stop online portal where this content can be made permanently accessible, and to promote that online portal as yet another Hub product providing tremendous value by boosting the communications capacity of our friends, partners and peer organizations around the state.

Building media relationships that benefit the network

There are more than 100 small and mid-size local newspapers, community websites and other media broadcasters across the West Virginia. In order to help our sector partners better broadcast their issues, The Hub recognized the need to build a reliable and time-efficient pipeline to these broadcasters. Enter the West Virginia Press Association (WVPA).

The Hub began working with the WVPA in March 2015 to include, for the first time, regular community development-related news in the WVPA's daily outreach to editors across the state.

After several meetings between The Hub and WVPA staff, it was arranged that WVPA would provide syndicated coverage of food and agriculture funding and assistance programs coordinated by our partners, the West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition and VC2.

A single story was written by a WVPA journalist and provided to the association's 80 newspaper members. The result: a greater awareness of activity and opportunity in the local food and agriculture sector, and an immediate increase in web traffic to the WVFFC website.



IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2015, THE HUB HAS PROVIDED DIRECT IN-PERSON COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING TO MORE THAN 590 PEOPLE ACROSS DOZENS OF ORGANIZATIONS IN WEST VIRGINIA.



IN THE FIRST 6 MONTHS OF 2015, WVHUB.ORG RECEIVED 43,559 UNIQUE PAGE VIEWS.

THE HUB'S EMAIL LIST HAS GROWN FROM ABOUT 6,300 TO MORE THAN 8,000 EMAIL CONTACTS.

Next up: A regionally-tailored story for all 80 newspapers on funding and assistance opportunities to help communities deal with dilapidated buildings.

This is a great template for The Hub and our partners for engaging the broader public with some of our big issues in the coming years.

Growing our audience

Through a combination of communication strategies, The Hub has been able to achieve massive increases in traffic to wvhub.org in 2015.

In the first 6 months of 2015, wvhub.org received 43,559 unique page views.

This was generated in part by a six-fold growth in Facebook reach—not merely “likes” but also the number of people sharing The Hub’s posts with their friends, and friends of friends.

The end result, and the focus of all efforts to drive traffic to wvhub.org, was email list growth. In the first six months of 2015, The Hub’s email list has grown from about 6,300 to more than 8,000 email contacts.

Bringing big ideas into the room

When it comes to networking and sharing information, West Virginia’s geography presents a real challenge, as do the busy schedules of our peers. Simple communication mechanisms can be a solution.

At Hubapalooza 2015 in Summersville, The Hub experimented with using web-based conferencing to bring a heralded expert into the room to share valuable lessons and real-world strategies with attendees.

Kevin Johnson’s Skype Q&A about how the Alderson Food Hub used Kickstarter to raise \$31,000 was one of the most popular sessions of the conference, and provided a simple template for how The Hub can greatly expand its networking opportunities across the state.

In the fall of 2015, The Hub plans to host its first fully online conference, where organizations across the state interested in the creation of locally owned grocery stores will connect with experts in the field and communities that have successfully tackled the problem.



CONNECT
180 MILES
of Rail Trail

AND I'LL
COME FROM
Washington, DC

THE HUB EXPERIENCED
A SIX-FOLD GROWTH
IN FACEBOOK REACH
IN THE FIRST 6
MONTHS OF 2015



The State of Our Communities Report: A new narrative for West Virginia

The statewide obesity index. Outmigration rates. The production decline of traditionally dominant West Virginia industries. Historically, measures and analysis of what's happening in West Virginia have been reactive, pessimistic, and have offered little insight into a productive way forward for the state's people, institutions or industries.

To counterbalance this tendency, the new State of Our Communities Report—to be launched online in November 2015—will, for the first time, take a closer look at what is really going on in West Virginia, in a way that better captures the ambitions and concerns of our citizens, the strength of our local economies, the activity on our main streets, and the plans of our young people and entrepreneurs of the future.

Imagined, coordinated and executed by The Hub in concert with our friends and peers across every sector of West Virginia's development, the State of Our Communities Report will bring together West Virginia's leading community organizations and sector authorities to provide genuinely illuminating insight into West Virginia's present and future. State of Our Communities partners include:

- ▶ West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition
- ▶ The Tamarack Foundation
- ▶ West Virginia Farmers Market Association
- ▶ Tech Connect
- ▶ Abandoned Properties Coalition
- ▶ Generation WV
- ▶ Inspire WV



- ▶ What's Next WV
- ▶ West Virginia University
- ▶ Foodlink
- ▶ New River Gorge RDA
- ▶ National Conference on Citizenship
- ▶ West Virginia Physical Activity Network
- ▶ Try This WV
- ▶ Active Southern WV
- ▶ Community Power Network

In partnership with Secretary of State Natalie Tennant, the State of Our Communities Report is a cross-sector collaboration examining key metrics, trends, successes and challenges in the various sectors that drive West Virginia's economic transition, health, activity and civic engagement. Ahead of its launch, the State of Our Communities Report has already attracted a diverse network of supporters who recognize the value of such a tool for anyone with an interest in promoting West Virginia as a great place to live, work and do business, and to provide a much needed counter-narrative to the established public perception of West Virginia as a place with a bleak future.

We believe the State of Our Communities Report will have an impact on the public conversation around community development for decades to come, with updates and releases of new data and content each year, to track the progress of each sector toward established goals.

JUST SOME OF THE ACTIVITY IN WEST VIRGINIA THE STATE OF OUR COMMUNITIES REPORT WILL MEASURE:

- ▶ ANNUAL REVENUE OF REGIONAL ARTISANS AND CRAFTSPEOPLE
- ▶ JOB SATISFACTION LEVELS OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS
- ▶ ECONOMIC VALUE OF LOCAL FOOD AGGREGATION BUSINESSES
- ▶ LOCAL EFFORTS TO REHABILITATE DILAPIDATED BUILDINGS
- ▶ GROWTH OF BUSINESS INCUBATORS
- ▶ LOCAL EFFORTS TO INCREASE DIVERSITY IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP
- ▶ AVAILABILITY OF INNOVATION AND TECH TRAINING PROGRAMS
- ▶ GROWTH OF COMMUNITY-LED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GROUPS
- ▶ LEVEL OF PHILANTHROPIC GIVING
- ▶ POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE





The Hub is in a constant state of appraisal, exploration and self-examination. Our ambitions are innovation and continued improvement.

We fully recognize the resources and expertise supporting community development work in West Virginia are in finite supply, and so The Hub is driven to make sure these resources are being put to the best use, for the most sustainable gains.

During the course of producing this report, as we reflected on the trials of community development sectors across the region and the trends that have emerged in recent years, an informed forecast of community development opportunities and threats in West Virginia began to take shape.

Listed here is a quick summary of those opportunities and threats, in no particular order. Our hope for providing this summary is that it may inform and direct the continued efforts of The Hub, our partners and regional funders, and provide another catalyzing moment to coordinate our movements toward a stronger, healthier and more vibrant West Virginia.

A change of leadership at The Hub in 2016 makes this visioning exercise all the more vital. The opportunity to reimagine and craft a potentially new direction for The Hub should be seized only with some analysis of what factors we anticipate will be in play in the years and decades to come.

Recruitment.

As it pertains to volunteers sustaining efforts like Our Children, Our Future, or community coaches continuing the local capacity increases of Turn This Town Around, we need to get more people, new people, involved. At present, there are too few “usual suspects,” from serial board members to a small core of part-time and volunteer staff seemingly involved in everything. Burnout is a real threat, and there is a pressing need to mine new energy and divergent voices. From a programmatic perspective, the opportunity presents itself for public engagement and education programs aimed more intentionally at the general public, students and people outside our traditional support bases.

Online interaction.

Whether it be for conference and workshop events, soliciting local information, evaluating programs or building campaign support, more attention needs to be paid to creating effective and attractive online portals. In the near future, more of our interactions with citizens, decision makers, advocates and targets

will be done through digital products. How well we can design those products will dictate our level of success in engaging a new generation of West Virginians in our efforts.

A regional awareness.

The POWER Initiative is a pertinent example of the growing demand for community development work in Appalachia to have a regional focus, less conscious of traditional boundaries and more of geographic groupings defined by industry, tourism and economic opportunity. Such an awareness of regional strategy will not only grow The Hub's network of active partners and supporters throughout Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia and Pennsylvania, but also will ensure the community development projects and initiatives The Hub promotes for West Virginia are attractive to regional and federal funders, such as the Appalachian Regional Commission and the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

As it pertains to programmatic activity of The Hub and our partners, involving regional agencies and peers in neighboring states should be a focus of economic development efforts.

Responsive, flexible.

Recent successes of the network turning its attention to food and agriculture, physical activity, broadband, federal funding for coal-impacted communities and locally created grocery stores, for example, has highlighted the need for The Hub to be sensitive to new and developing opportunities.

In a rapidly changing economic, political and social landscape, such responsiveness is a vital trait and should be reflected in our organizational structure.

A fifth approach.

The development of the State of Our Communities report has highlighted the need for better research into the real impact of the network's achievements and the landscape in which we all operate. Only through accurate analysis of current social and economic patterns and conditions will we be able to develop the programs and approaches to best address those conditions.





Diversify funding.

The organizations working in support of community and economic development in West Virginia are overly reliant on the financial support of a small number of regional foundations.

The opportunity exists to build new partnerships with the business community, a natural but underutilized relationship given the connection of our work to the state's workforce recruitment strategy, health and workforce productivity, support for the innovation economy, and small business development. Additionally, the value and measurable impact of a number of our programs raises the possibility of pursuing "fee for service" opportunities, membership, and other methods to diversify our funding streams.

Benefits for nonprofit staff.

Most nonprofits in the state struggle to offer adequate or affordable health benefits for their employees. This will continue to make it very hard to attract the best young talent to the state, and is already forcing many promising employees to look elsewhere for more secure employment.

The opportunity: work with WVNPA and partners in the health care sector to explore a market-driven solution, such as a large co-op or pool of nonprofit employees, to bargain for more competitive health insurance options.

Building civic infrastructure.

The successes in Buckhannon, Huntington, Richwood and Grafton have shown us what is possible when solid civic infrastructure is in place to allow citizens to meet regularly and discuss how to improve their community in a respectful, positive and structured way. The programmatic opportunities now are twofold:

1. Help more communities create regular civic meetings around community development.
2. Develop a way to translate the ideas that come out of those meetings to decision makers at the local and state level.

If these two pieces are in place, great things happen. This should be incorporated into all of The Hub's community-based work in the future.

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