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Setting the Stage for Community Change

I think a healthy community is one where people are not just out for themselves, and they are not just working on their individual pursuits, but where they understand their relationship and responsibility to other people.

Wilma Mankiller

As communities and citizens look to one another for answers to the most compelling social questions of our time, they need a wide-angle lens. American communities are broad and deep. They range from Almena, Wisconsin (population 720), to Tupelo, Mississippi (population 35,000), to Portland, Oregon, (population 529,000) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Citizens in each of those communities, and hundreds like them, have ideas—good ideas—that need to be understood, tailored, communicated, and acted upon. However, among this variegated landscape of what we call community, there are no perfect ones. Even those with flowing fountains, rehabilitated Main Streets, and robust economies still have issues to address.

Framing the Issues

This chapter sets the stage for the seven leverage points. It gives a glimpse of urban development and its modern-day implications. We know that the community building progress is never linear. Some of the early American cities that started strong have faltered; new places have sprung up seemingly overnight. The important variable is how communities managed their inevitable change.

Success does not happen by chance. It can occur for different reasons. Sometimes it is the “right place at the right time” phenomenon, but most often it is a combination of forces. Good decisions at critical times carry the day for the future. They can be headline catchers, but more likely they are day-to-day actions of people in the community that reflect a value system and a way of working.

Communities Come in All Sizes

The term *community* is used throughout this book to limit the use of stratifying terms, like *urban*, *rural*, *suburban*, *region*, or just *city*. Those are real and tangible classifications, but rarely does one hear, “I am working to make my suburb better.” People live in communities. They may be high-rise, low-rise, dangerous, safe, attractive, littered—but people still live there.

Community is a term that is used very specifically on the one hand and very casually on the other. Community evolves around three nexuses: the community of relationships, the community of interests, and the community of place. When the famed Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in the nineteenth century, he was impressed by the associational life of Americans: by their connections to activities and organizations—*their relationships*, by the common concerns that bound them together—*their interests*, but also by the propensity to talk over the back fence on issues of

mutual concern—*their place*. The connections and interrelationships of community allowed for a stronger and more vibrant civic life. This view of nineteenth-century life may be a simplistic overstatement of civic life as we know it. It is easier to think in “common” terms when our geographical space is well-defined and our relational interests clear. It is not so easy when cultures clash and interests conflict. In nineteenth-century America, it was likely that a person knew the neighbor on the other side of the fence. Today it is important to both understand and build on our varying definitions and new expressions of community.

Modern-day community life is hard to isolate and to generate. Boundaries, from city limit signs to fire districts to backyard fences, don’t tell the whole story. Our lives and fortunes are entangled in ways that de Tocqueville could never have imagined. Suburbs are no longer just that—they are inner ring and outer ring, and they respond to the central city and one another in unique ways. Rural areas abut major metropolitan areas and are accessible to them by a short car or train ride. Small cities connect to other small cities to create regional presence.

Identifying common interests within and between communities of place, however, is the name of the game. We cannot separate ourselves from one another no matter how hard we try. The suburbs have a stake in the central city; cities have a stake in the suburbs; and rural areas are affected by cities and regions. Places that can establish strong identities for themselves while developing relationships with their neighbors hold the greatest promise for economic, social, and civic success.

Now what are communities? They are where individuals live, connect, and are responsible for one another. Sometimes they are called cities, like Denver; sometimes they are called regions, like western North Carolina; sometimes they are called cultures, like Hmong; and sometimes they are just called home, like Almena, Wisconsin.

What We Know About Communities

The more than 280 million people who live in America live in communities of all sizes (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Jacksonville, Florida, has a land mass of 841 square miles and a population of 736,000. New York City has a land mass of 304 square miles and a population of over 8 million. Table 1.1 shows the diversity of size that challenges any definition of community. Within this broad spectrum, we know that all places share promise and peril. Extraordinarily poor people live in all kinds of communities—rural farms and high-rise apartments. Economic downturns hit cities, suburbs, and small towns without favor.

Although the nation's urban policy has never directed America's population to be spread between places of all sizes, that is exactly what has happened. As a nation, by our patterns of settlement, we have taken the stand that we do not want to be a country of just major hubs with fast-food restaurants in between. Even in the early establishment of the nation, citizens found themselves moving toward less populated areas for both space and opportunities. The slogan "Go west, young man" represented not only a desire to move out of the populated northeast but also the need for more opportunity. Consciously or not, we have put a premium on the diversity of communities and what they offer.

There has always been a proverbial clash between American values and "way of life" as it relates to cities. Historically, many Americans were afraid of the negative aspects of cities. Even today, opinion polls show that Americans say that they would prefer to live in a small town. Yet when asked additional questions about what they value in their quality-of-life index, they respond with such things as access to medical care, culture, and business opportunities (Abbott, 1992, p. 115). This ambivalence has been both the boom and the bust of cities. People are quite attracted to the glitter and access of cities but prefer to locate themselves and their families far enough away to avoid the negative aspects of cities, and

Table 1.1. Where America Lives

<i>Population</i>	<i>Number of Places</i>	<i>Total Population</i>
Under 1,000	11,024	4,446,489
1,000–2,499	5,063	8,256,846
2,500–9,999	5,507	28,138,325
10,000–24,999	2,054	32,174,525
25,000–49,999	838	29,005,785
50,000–249,999	597	54,884,108
250,000–499,999	38	13,702,659
500,000–999,999	20	12,905,864
1,000,000 and above	9	22,947,966

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

especially higher taxes (p. 119). They want to feel safe, know their neighbors, and have an easy commute but also have the advantages of big-city amenities.

Smaller cities and towns are no longer isolated from the mainstream economic world, which is often associated with big urban areas. They have capitalized on the technology revolution and thrust themselves into the forefront of international business. Distance from the national business epicenters, once considered the death knell of business enterprise, is virtually erased by such now commonplace aids as computers, fax machines, and the Internet.

The last two decades have also seen a sharpening of our understanding of community “writ large,” so to speak. We now think in local as well as regional contexts. Historically, we have thought of cities and their issues by size—cities over a million, cities over 250,000, and so forth. Now we know better. As borders touch and issues run past the city limits signs, we must recalibrate our conception of a city or community and its impact. For the purposes of this book, we will include four general types of communities: urban areas, “metropolitowns,” smaller cities and towns, and rural areas. This appears at first glance to be a narrow swath through a large

field. There will be little attention to suburbs or to regions—although both are critically important to the health of all sizes of communities. The emphasis is on the core places that people call home or, better said, their home base. The four categories need a little explanation:

- *Urban areas* run the gamut from New York City and Los Angeles on the one end to Atlanta and St. Louis on the other. The division of urban core from suburban ring notwithstanding, this category includes those central cities that have the largest populations, with New York City at the top and Riverside, California, at the end of the list with 255,166 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).
- *Metropolitowns* are a new category, designated by Pew Partnership research as places with populations of 50,000 to 250,000. They offer the culture, amenities, and resources of large metropolitan areas while preserving a quality of life often associated with small-town living.
- *Small cities and towns* have populations between 10,000 and 49,000. These are often county seats, homes to universities, state capitals, or just places where people live, work, and want their children to stay.
- *Rural areas* are communities under 10,000 and can range down to populations of one single person, according to the 2000 U.S. census.

Size, we have learned, is no guarantee of more interaction among people on issues of common concern; some of the most divided communities are smaller ones. Although we certainly cannot overgeneralize all community problems, I would argue that places of all sizes provide the opportunity to examine issues and remedies

with fresh perspectives. Cities, towns, and rural areas have unique circumstances because of size, but there is less validation today for separating the analysis of their issues than four decades ago. Smaller cities, metropolitowns, and even rural areas have new issues to address because of changing demographics, access to transportation, and technology. Communities of all sizes are no longer isolated from centers of commerce. They are aggressive economic developers, competing for the attention of national and international firms, developing sophisticated high-technology parks, repositioning their economies, revitalizing their central business districts, and finding ways to make their communities better.

Place still matters. Despite the whirl of bits and bytes, and the eye-blinking speed of the Internet, people and businesses want to live and work in real communities. Writing in the *Harvard Business Review* (1995), Michael Porter makes a compelling case for having one eye focused on the world and one eye focused at home. In theory, he argues, global markets, advanced technology, and high-speed transportation *should* reduce the role that location plays in business competition. But the opposite is true: a sustainable and competitive economic advantage is rooted in tapping the unique benefits of location. Improving our communities is a critical factor in creating a competitive advantage domestically and globally (p. 58).

A community can be successful attracting new economic development, but it must also have a conducive culture to attract people. In *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), Richard Florida writes that creative communities can be the critical variable in attracting the creative class and creative companies to particular areas. There are 38 million Americans who work in science and engineering, architecture, the arts, education, and music and who are looking for places that have a “creative climate,” one that values ethnic and cultural diversity, a concentration of younger people, an arts-and-music scene, outdoor recreation, technology, and what is called *third places* (p. 8, pp. 215–234). These third places are neither work nor home, but rather the places that citizens go for less-formal interactions—places such as coffee shops, bookstores, and cafés (Oldenburg, 1989).

In other words, it is not enough to eliminate the negatives; we must also cultivate and invest in the value-added positives. Successful community efforts have found the right combination of community investments and amenities that foster, cultivate, and encourage a different kind of place for community and economic activity. Places such as Austin, San Diego, and Asheville understand this, but so do places like Wilmington, North Carolina, which boasts the largest film production facility east of California. As people in communities look for answers, the ideas and solutions may come from places unlike their own. As the following chapters illustrate, success is neither place- nor size-bound. It comes from a set of seven tested leverage points that help all communities decide their futures.

How Communities Came to Be

Every day's news bombards us with a litany of problems and crises. The good news is that we are not alone; the bad news is that we have dealt with civic concerns since our founding and the problems never seem to go away. Concern over social challenges has been a part of the American psyche from the country's birth. Before and after the American Revolution, colonial cities were growing and becoming more diverse in every respect. Early American communities were ordered both physically and socially, and land was appropriated according to social position and hierarchy. Unfortunately, those early patterns of urban development are alive and thriving today and must still be reckoned with.

Morton and Lucia White (1962) write that after the Civil War, there were increased concerns about the impersonality of the city, the lack of genuine communication, the increased number of immigrants, and "too little continuity of face-to-face relations for the sound and full development of character" (p. 218). The end of the war brought to northern and southern cities alike a major building and rebuilding phase and aided the shift from rural to urban that added to their concerns.

Communities grew in three major stages. The first was gradual, stretching from the colonial era to the early nineteenth century. Cities like Philadelphia (1682), Charleston (1672), and Providence (1636) came into existence in the colonial period. The second stage filled a century from 1820 to 1920 and reflected the industrial boom and westward expansion. This period of rapid urbanization firmly established cities as an integral component of American life. Finally, the third stage, considered the modern urban age, began in the 1920s and continues today. In addition to growth in existing urban areas, this period has seen the creation of cities and the tremendous growth of suburbs surrounding metropolitan areas. In fact, in 1910 the U.S. Census Bureau created the classification *metropolitan district* to use as a vehicle for collecting data on the inhabitants living outside the central city. By 1920, the census found that more than half of the nation's population was urban (Abbott, 1992, p. 111). Today its urban population exceeds 80 percent of the total.

One of the more interesting phenomena of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America was the *planned community*, or the community of interests and relationships, and settlement patterns it set for the future. There were several types of planned communities: company towns that were developed and built for employees and their families, communities that were built outside the city as an escape from the wear and tear of central-city life, and communities that were built as self-contained entities.

In the first instance, company towns were not new. As the Industrial Revolution took hold in America in the nineteenth century, rows of similar, if not exact, "company" houses were built outside factories, lumberyards, and textile mills. Volumes have been written about life in mill villages. What is unique about some of these planned communities is that the word *community* (though limited) was taken seriously: communities were viewed as something other than housing stock. Two examples of these planned communities are Lowell, Massachusetts, and Pullman, Illinois. In the case of Lowell, a thriving textile town founded in 1822, enlightened

self-interest prodded the town and the business owners to provide amenities to the labor force, such as suitable housing for single women as well as for the larger workforce. Lowell typified what could happen in a mill town. Its fortunes turned after 1860, as a later chapter explains, and Lowell began on a downward spiral. However, its modern-day renaissance, one could argue, had its origins in the fact that companies had the capital and political influence to build housing, public buildings, and public parks that later became the rallying cry for preservation. Pullman, Illinois, was the model community of George Pullman of sleeping-car fame. Pullman forbade alcohol (to maintain sobriety), established a library (to encourage serious thought), and maintained all housing as rental units (to control his workforce). At the end of the nineteenth century, labor unrest and economic downturn caused its demise (Abbott, 1992, p. 118). The infrastructure that Pullman had financed later became the pride of the community.

The second type of planned community is the luxurious one often found outside large urban areas. Residential areas like Llewellyn Park, New Jersey; Shaker Heights, Ohio; and Riverside, Illinois, were havens of pastoral security for those who wanted to have the benefits of city life without the hassles. These types of suburban communities illustrated the exodus (although slight at first) of higher-income families out of the central city (Abbott, 1992, p. 118).

Finally, and perhaps the most interesting of the three, are communities of interests and relationships that grew around three ideas: *conviction*, *culture*, and *discrimination*. The followers of Joseph Smith wanted to practice their religion, Mormonism, with religious freedom in Utah; the Shakers wanted a communal life at Sabbathday Lake and elsewhere. Newly immigrated Chinese bore the brunt of housing discrimination and threat to personal safety and clustered in "Chinatowns" from coast to coast. The African American relocation to northern cities like New York and Chicago was met with many of the same barriers and dangers that occurred in the segregated South. Housing and social-participation options were closed, so they established communities of their own. Harlem was a

summer retreat for wealthy white New Yorkers until the late nineteenth century, when it became one of the few places African Americans could find housing in New York City. “Little Havana” in Miami became a comfortable assimilation place for newly arrived Cuban refugees.

What is important about these particular models of planned communities is their transference to modern circumstances. What can be inferred, for then as well as now, is that urban isolationism is difficult if not impossible to sustain. Short of a walled city, every American community is open to the influences of a larger area. Second, suburbs, then and now, take taxpaying, home-owning citizens away from the central city that needs them desperately. Despite their removed location, however, suburbs of all kinds are affected by the changes of fortune in the neighboring central city. As David Rusk (1993) writes in *Cities Without Suburbs*, the relative wealth of suburbs is related to the financial strength of the neighboring central city. Finally, commercial enterprises located in a city have considerable effect on how that community develops and the kinds of amenities and assets it offers. A diversified commerce brings sustained vitality to communities of all sizes. Whereas communities dominated by one industry or business benefited when times were good, they have suffered unmercifully in the downturns. Flint, Michigan, a General Motors town through and through, is a living example of the booms and the busts around one industry.

The Growth and Decline of Communities

Historically, as now, both the growth and the decline of communities have been caused by a broad spectrum of factors and circumstances. In the nineteenth century, westward movement brought population growth west of the Mississippi for a number of reasons. Mining and large parcels of inexpensive farm and ranch land drew people out of the crowded Northeast. A city like Denver, though land- and mountain-locked, grew very rapidly because it was the urban hub for the vast hinterland of ranchers and farmers. The city

grew from its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century to over a hundred thousand by 1890 (Monkkonen, 1988, p. 84).

Jefferson, Texas, in contrast, was the “Riverport to the Southwest” in the mid-nineteenth century, a bustling port where Mississippi River cargo boats loaded and unloaded. In a time before railroads came to north Texas, Jefferson provided the only alternative for importing and exporting for the region. In its heyday, Jefferson was second to Galveston in cargo tonnage shipped from Texas. Jefferson’s decline was prompted in part by a decision by the U.S. Corps of Engineers in 1873 to remove a natural barrier on the Red River called the Great Raft, which dropped the water level in the port so that shipping was questionable and no longer profitable. The coming of the railroads completed the demise. Today Jefferson is a quaint town that has built a premier tourist industry around the river and its prestigious past (Jefferson, Texas, Web site).

Some cities remade themselves to appeal to the changing national environment. Southern cities, devastated by the Civil War, began to build back and acquire economic clout. Atlanta was in prime position when the notion of the “Sunbelt” first began to get notice in the 1970s. It became a “world-class city,” at its own naming, and began to act like one. As one Georgia trade official commented, “The Sunbelt is not sunshine. It’s an attitude . . . conducive to business. The North has lost that attitude.” All this boosterism notwithstanding, there has been a resurgence of fortunes of cities from the deep South to the Southwest to the far West (even Oklahoma added a rising-sun logo to the license plates) (Larsen, 1990, pp. 148–150).

Boosterism, however, sometimes works. Duluth, Minnesota, a community at the tip of northern Minnesota, was promoted by its boosters in the nineteenth century as a transportation hub, connecting St. Paul, Chicago, New York, Paris, London, and Calcutta! Certainly a possibility, but not a direct route by any means (Monkkonen, 1988, pp. 83–84). Duluth today is a city of over 85,000 people that counts international shipping among its major industries. It is the largest port on the Great Lakes and one of the premier bulk cargo

ports in North America, with more than a thousand ships from many foreign countries docking at the Duluth-Superior port every year. Communities can create image, substance, and their future (Duluth, Minnesota, Web site).

The point, of course, is that the evolution of American communities has been caused by both internal and external factors. The main objective has been to manage those conditions in the most productive way. The places that have done that are still around, perhaps with a different look, because they have taken charge of their future. Others that did not adapt or at least keep up have paid the price economically. None of this is to suggest that communities should follow the latest fad. Neither can they let the future just happen to them. They have to organize themselves for success.

Even though Americans are by nature independent and individualistic, it has become increasingly clear that smart communities must think about the rest of their county or the rest of their region as they craft decisions. The issues and the opportunities facing communities cannot be addressed unilaterally. Solving the crime problem in the inner city or the lack of living-wage jobs needs a region's best thinking and action. Likewise, mounting a major regional economic development effort requires that more than one community or location be involved.

Political reformer Fredrick Howe's notion was that cities were the hope of democracy because of their ability to give a fair start to all people through schools, health, and social services. Despite this hopefulness, challenges presented by cities and towns of all sizes are not new and are not going away. Jane Jacobs wrote in 1961 that there is a wistful myth among us that if we only had enough money, we could wipe out slums in a decade, revitalize aging and seemingly passé neighborhoods, anchor the wandering middle class, and corral the traffic problems. Jacobs sarcastically observes that even with a few billion we seem to have made the problems worse. In her words, "We have not rebuilt cities, we have sacked them" (p. 4). Jacobs is certainly right that money alone will not "fix" problems, but smart investment plus new ways of thinking and working can.

The Mailboxes on Main Street

A growing phenomenon in all communities is their increased diversity. No longer do the mailboxes on Main Street just have names like Smith, Jones, and Washington. They are now interspersed with Gonzales and Rhon. Coastal cities as well as traditionally homogeneous landlocked communities have had a change in their demographic composition.

Shifting demographics are perhaps the most significant change affecting communities in all locales and of all sizes. The melting pot has moved to middle America. Ethnic grocery stores, places of worship, and non-English radio and television abound in previously homogeneous communities. You do not have to go to Little Havana in Miami to attend church services in Spanish. You can go to Allentown, Pennsylvania. Or if you want to understand more about southeast Asian culture, you can visit Wausau, Wisconsin.

According to the 1980 U.S. census, Wausau, Wisconsin, was the most ethnically homogeneous city in the nation, with less than 1 percent of the population nonwhite (Beck, 1994). Wausau has, over the last decade or so, become home to thousands of Hmong immigrants from the mountain tribes of Laos. Hmong children make up a quarter of Wausau's elementary school enrollment, and Asians make up 4.5 percent of the total population of 38,426. A resettlement area for the Lutheran Church, Wausau became home to hundreds of Hmong families fleeing the oppressive government in Laos. In addition to the Laotian refugees, Wausau is now home to Chinese, Cambodians, Filipinos, Norwegians, Albanians, and a recent influx from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc nations. Wausau and hundreds of communities of all sizes are experiencing significant changes in their populations (Wausau, Wisconsin, Web site).

Of course, this dichotomy of perception about community is what makes the journey interesting. There is a demographic mosaic that can be learned from and embraced. John Gardner's challenge for the demographic diversity of our communities has never been more important. He said that we must create "wholeness out of

diversity,” that is, embrace our differences as well as our commonality (Gardner, 1990, p. 116). The nation is evolving demographically. With this change comes new challenges and opportunities to make decisions and implement strategies that create communities that welcome, support, and sustain newcomers.

Assimilating new people into communities presents challenges and opportunities. Some longtime residents are concerned that the newly settled groups will overburden schools, services, and employment. In areas that are depressed economically, contenders for the few jobs available are resentful when more job seekers enter the pool. But this is just one side of the story and unfortunately the one we hear most about.

On the other side of the story are successful experiences that occur when the assimilation process and welcome mat work together. In the Fargo-Moorhead area, there is a conscious effort to create opportunities for foreign-born newcomers to assimilate into the community, with language programs, job counseling, and places to meet on issues and concerns. Through Cultural Resources, Inc., the region has created a structure to positively bridge the transition not only for the newcomers but also for longtime residents. In Wausau, Wisconsin, the school system has developed programs to help children and parents who are foreign-born have a positive school experience. As one school official said, “Our relationship and support of newcomers ultimately makes Wausau a more desirable place for business to locate and for people to live and raise families.”

Finding Community Solutions from Within

Over the last several decades, many well-intentioned “solutions” have been applied to communities of all sizes. Whole blocks and neighborhoods have been demolished; whole blocks and neighborhoods have been built; waterfronts have been repaired; downtown cobblestones have been installed; downtown cobblestones have been removed; small-business investments have been made; large-business incentives have been given. You name it. Some of the

many efforts have worked, but by and large the one-size-fits-all solutions have fallen short.

The methods for improving communities that have had the most success are those where nonprofits, business, local government, and citizens have made a commitment and an investment to make their particular situation better. Research has shown that when residents of low-income housing projects get invested, things get better. Evidence further suggests that what distinguishes safe neighborhoods from unsafe ones is not the ratio of police to residents or the frequency of probation offenses but rather the social fabric of the neighborhood and the condition of families (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999). When business takes an interest in the schools or when local government incorporates citizens into the decision-making process, things usually get better. Community success is not only possible, it is happening when communities come together.

For its major initiative, *Wanted: Solutions for America*, begun in 1998, the Pew Partnership looked across America for programs that were working. The research documented clearly that discrete approaches to community programs are achieving documentable results. Because the programs studied dealt with diverse issues, ranging from dental health for children, to reducing substance abuse among teens, to providing access to financial capital for low-income and underserved populations, it was the common threads that were of most importance to seek out. It became clear that solutions occur when connections are made between people and organizations and also between resources and needs. Results happen when minds and attitudes are changed about the problem, about the stakeholders, and about the communities themselves. Successful efforts solve problems on the scale that is called for. They define their scope and work in manageable pieces. Finally, the best program results occur when there is inclusion, participation, and deliberation (Freedman, 2003).

Community success must be measured block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood, and city by city. Despite the glimmers of

hope that shine through, there are just as many community failures. The question, of course, is “Why some places and not others? Why some neighborhoods and not others?” Peirce and Guskind (1993) contend that relationship and civic engagement provide a key to the kind of success every community seeks: “Positive urban breakthroughs rest not so much on electing brilliant people to office—though it is surely handy to have them there—as on the birth of a civic culture of cooperation and a belief in the future, with individuals willing to take up the torch to make that better future a reality. . . .” (p. 3). Success then is not driven by one political party, a revitalized downtown, or even a new high school; it is about new ways of doing business, different ways of thinking about place and people. As Peirce and Guskind say, “The challenges in American society are far more complex than simply putting roofs over people’s heads. They have to do with community” (p. 4). The empowerment of people in solving their own problems is *the* vehicle for civic change and must be the overriding factor as we seek to build and rebuild communities.

These ideas of community, citizen empowerment, and grassroots solutions square with the experiences of communities throughout the United States. We have all realized that Jane Jacobs (1961) was right that billions of dollars will not fix cities. However, what will and is “fixing” communities is their own capacity for change and the way they go about their collective work. How people in a community see themselves and one another has everything to do with their well-being and that of their community. If they believe that change can happen, it usually does.

Harvard Professor Robert Putnam’s study (1993, p. 36) of twenty Italian communities found that some were economically and socially prosperous whereas others were fractious and had a lower standard of living. The difference, he concluded, was the result of generations of building trust and goodwill through “networks of civic engagement”—choral societies, civic groups, newspaper readership—that has allowed some of the communities to work together on issues of importance. The more prosperous regions drew on large

stores of social capital. Putnam and his colleagues contend that civic capacity is built when citizens take ownership and pride in their surroundings and interest in the well-being of people around them.

Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora (1990, p. 8, pp. 197–207) observed this trend of “civic ownership” in their research on rural communities in the Great Plains and the West. Their research concentrated on how economic conditions have affected ranching and farming communities. They found that rural communities must retain more of the resources that they have traditionally exported, including bright, hardworking young people, and they must know how to work together if they are to remain viable through the current macroeconomic challenges. These observations of rural communities, Putnam’s research on Italian communities and later on American communities, and Richard Florida’s research on creative communities are further evidence that what happens *in* a community is as important as what happens *to* a community. The normal cyclical progression of economies, leaders, and the influence of outside factors affects every community at one time or another. Those that manage these inevitable changes are places that have developed a sense of the future that includes and is shared by the larger community.

New Ways of Working

The analysis and the solutions to problems for communities of all sizes will require a different approach. Focusing on the bounty, not the drought, is the key to both understanding and improving communities. In a 1992 conference on solutions for urban America, sponsored by three of the nation’s larger foundations, Annie E. Casey, Ford, and Rockefeller, the tone of the conversation was a departure from the decades of “urban strategy” sessions. The discussions moved away from the more technical aspects of cities, like planning, municipal-bond options, and solid-waste disposal, to the more intangibles, like community building, engaging stakeholders,

and tapping community assets. Recognizing that the large carrots of federal and state money were probably things of the past, participants proposed holistic approaches, which moved away from solution wars and identified practical steps that every community could use. The advice from this conference called for communities to have structures and vehicles for defining their vision of their future. Stable community-based organizations or development corporations (or both) must be in place and functioning. Diverse coalitions must be established that involve the stakeholders in and out of the affected area (or problem). This includes the need to develop leadership at all levels and encourage the empowerment of people to affect their own lives. Finally, communities seeking alliances and partnerships to revitalize communities must face persistent concerns about how to address race and ethnicity in an increasingly pluralistic society.

The focus for the future must be on how American communities *can* work and work better. Even though history has shown us lessons, directions, and examples of positive change, cities have been so bombarded by problems and challenges that there is little time, money, or sometimes even interest to take the long view. They have been pressured to do something and do it now. Expediency is one route to take, but community histories are fraught with the results of too much, too fast, too little, or too slow. The Three Bears had the winning combination: just right is what we need in the new community model. This new approach will take time, thought, and persistence.

Getting Started in Your Community

Community challenges took generations to take hold and may take generations to solve. The questions, of course, are these: How do you know what to do? and How do you know when to do it? There are day-to-day demands, unexpected expenditures, and inevitable changes because of weather, new demands, economic downturns, and competing choices. How can you ever know for sure?

The answers lie in the seven leverage points that frame this book: investing right the first time, working together, building on community strengths, practicing democracy, preserving the past, growing leaders, and inventing a brighter future. However, change of any kind requires that there be the desire for change, a willingness to do things differently, and a belief that a change of behavior or tactics will produce a different result. To begin this process, it is critical that you know your community better. Who lives in your community? What are the critical issues facing the community? What needs to happen for change to occur? Building on this foundation of knowledge, you can then begin to join with others to implement the processes in the chapters that follow. As a practical matter, you need some colleagues to join you. I suggest that you organize a brown-bag or even an e-mail chat with several other people to begin this process of change. Remember that the conversation in the community is different now—you are in it.

Communities are rich mosaics of size, people, institutions, traditions, even problems. The pieces fit together in a pattern, but pieces can be added that change the design entirely. For our purposes, the new pieces are the proven strategies for success that are found in the following seven leverage points. They broaden and enrich the notion of community for everyone. Change strategies really work only when they include all people in creating a new mosaic.