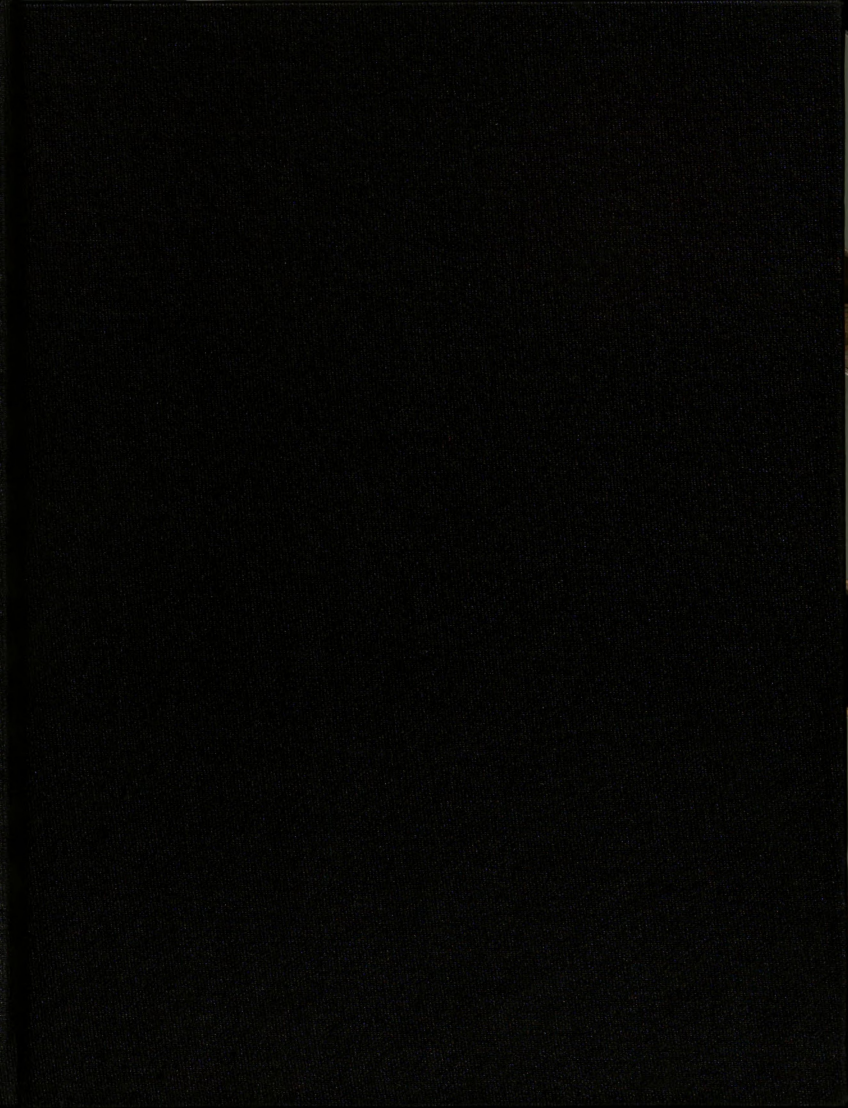




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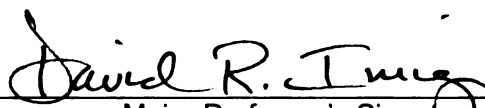
**A Mid-Term Evaluation of a
Rural Enterprise Community Program:
Creating Community Change From Within**

presented by

Douglas A. Woodard

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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**A MID-TERM EVALUATION OF A
RURAL ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY PROGRAM:
CREATING COMMUNITY CHANGE FROM WITHIN**

By

Douglas A. Woodard

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

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ABSTRACT
A MID-TERM EVALUATION OF A
RURAL ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY PROGRAM:
CREATING COMMUNITY CHANGE FROM WITHIN

By

Douglas A. Woodard

This dissertation presents the underlying rationale, methods, and findings of a mid-term evaluation study of the Midwestern County Enterprise Community (MCEC) program. The MCEC is a comprehensive community building initiative that seeks to improve the lives of all county citizens by targeting economic development, quality of life, and family self-sufficiency issues.

Using Constructivist Theory (CT) as an initial conceptual framework, this study employed a set of techniques prescribed by an action research approach that included a series of interviews with local leaders, observation of community-based meetings, secondary data analysis and two strategic futuring workshops. Throughout that process, local leaders and this investigator collaborated on all phases of creating, implementing, and evaluating activities that responded to the needs and expectations of the program's stakeholders. A key component in following that evolving course of action was the work of the strategic futuring group, called the Progress Team. That team used information regarding the history and current operation of the program, combined with a trends and vision analysis, to create a new action plan for the next phase of the MCEC.

In sum, the program implementation team performed at an impressive level in its first five years of operation, but program analysis data were interpreted to suggest that the program is at a critical crossroad of operation. In its first

phase—the focus of this study—stakeholders put the majority of their effort into enhancing the community's capacity to respond in a timely manner to emerging opportunities and threats by institutionalizing infrastructure. The final stage of the program will continue that effort, but also will address sustainability issues as the official Enterprise Community designation comes to an end. Two sets of tasks emerge as a result of that new direction and represent this study's primary recommendations:

- 1) Expand the number of community leaders to assist the core group of existing volunteers in carrying out MCEC planning and activities. This effort will focus on identifying, inviting, and training members of the county's rapidly expanding senior and seasonal citizen populations to play a greater role in community development activities, and
- 2) Mainstream the self-evaluation effort that began with this study through the MCEC's sponsorship of an on-going Progress Team.

Subsequent reflection on the process as a whole led to the realization that while constructivist theory served the process well from an inductive perspective, it was concluded that the simultaneous use of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) from a deductive perspective would have provided a richer meta-theoretical framework by which to conceptualize this evaluative study. It is suggested therefore that future evaluative studies investigating community change consider the use of both deductive (TLT) and inductive (CT) perspectives.

DEDICATION

To my family, who alternately encouraged, cajoled and at times, prodded me to complete the various requirements of my doctoral degree. A “thank-you” is extended to Dr. David Imig, as well, who always was available to guide me through the bends and over all of the bumps that I encountered on my mid-life journey through graduate school. Also, I extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Tom Summerfelt for his assistance with this project that was clearly above and beyond the call of duty.

I imagine that the statement, “I really never thought I would make it,” probably is made by the vast majority of those who attempt this sort of endeavor while also trying to maintain a full-time family and work life as well. I now join that group while acknowledging the fact that I would not have attained that end goal without the support of those mentioned above and of countless others who offered advice and counsel along the way.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AE –	Actual evaluation
BMS –	Benchmark Management System
BRS –	Benchmark Ranking System
CC –	Continuum of Care
DASH –	Decent, Affordable, Safe Housing
EC –	Enterprise Community
ED –	Economic development
EZ/EC –	Empowerment Zone / Enterprise Community
EP—	Evaluation process
FACT –	Families and Communities Together
FSS –	Family self-sufficiency
HUD –	Department of Housing and Urban Development
MCEC –	Midwestern County Enterprise Community
MSHDA –	Michigan State Housing Development Authority
MSU –	Michigan State University
MSUE –	Michigan State University Extension
QOL –	Quality of Life
RD –	Rural Development (as part of USDA)
RRA –	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SBI –	Small Business Initiative
SH –	Self-help
SWOT –	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
TA –	Technical assistance
USDA –	United States Department of Agriculture

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Midwestern County is a rural community of considerable contrast. On one hand, the combination of abundant natural resources (lakes, streams, and forest) and a highly accessible, mid-Lower Peninsula location make the area a vacation get-away for many generations of families visiting from the more urban, southern regions of Michigan and the Midwest. Historically, those tourists often turned into seasonal homeowners as they fulfilled a part of the American Dream of buying a cabin in the woods. That same group now represents one of the primary reasons why the county is experiencing a rapid increase of its senior population that is emigrating to the area after retirement; often to convert their vacation home to a year-around residence. Concurrently, many of Midwestern County's full-time citizens face challenges as part of their rural, mid-Michigan residency, including: a lack of new job opportunities in general, and of the jobs that are newly created, most are concentrated in a service industry that pays low hourly wages with little or no benefits to its workers; a persistently high poverty rate that seems to affect the county's young children in a disproportionate manner, and; the out-migration of high school graduates, a trend that robs the community of one of its most critical resources—young adults and young families (US Census, 2000 a-d; 1990 a-d)

This context of divergent socioeconomic trends was evident in 1998 when the Midwestern County community responded in force to an opportunity to be

named a federal rural Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC). The purpose of this national program was to provide assistance to the nation's most impoverished communities by encouraging the collaborative efforts of grassroots coalitions to "build from within" using a comprehensive approach. Objectives for the program focused on local leadership development of a cross section of the community's population, total community engagement in an initial and on-going strategic planning process, and the utilization of a regionally focused community development perspective meant to foster collaboration among local, regional, state and federal organizations. In Midwestern County, leaders and private citizens alike collaborated to create a ten-year strategic set of goals for community improvement that outlined the integration of most community services involving economic development; child and family assistance; healthcare; education; workforce development; environmental conservation; land use and recreational planning, plus; housing development and rehabilitation. A two-year work plan also was submitted to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the agency responsible for administrating EZ/EC rural designations, as part of the application process. That plan presented a timetable for addressing the holistic community development goals for the 75 percent of the county tracts deemed eligible according to grant requirements.

The monetary difference between the sought after EZ/EC designation and the EC version that the community actually received was considerable. Through three rounds and a total of 140 awards (rural and urban), communities named as rural EZ/ECs were promised between \$25-\$40 million for a ten-year period, while

rural ECs were slated to receive one-tenth, or less, of that amount. In Midwestern County's case, this difference translated to an EC program allotment of approximately \$250,000 per year. Other benefits and resources were made available to these rural programs as well. Most programs, whether of the EZ/EC or the EC variety, were promised comparable levels of technical assistance from their respective state USDA-Rural Development (RD) offices. This assistance came in many forms including leadership training for local board members, national conferences, plus the assignment of staff members at the federal and state levels who had direct EZ/EC program responsibilities to monitor the progress of individual programs and assist those groups as called upon. Some programs also had various tax credits and other incentives available to entice businesses to locate or expand within program designated boundaries (Aigner, Raymond, & Tirmizi, 2001; Aigner, Flora, Tirmizi, Wilcox, & Zimmerman, 1998). The Midwestern County Enterprise Community (MCEC) did benefit greatly from the technical assistance provided by the Michigan USDA-RD office—especially by regionally assigned staff members who specialized in community development and housing assistance. It, along with other Round II rural ECs, did not have the various tax incentives available to them, however, as that type of assistance was discontinued before 1999.

Midwestern County's award was announced in late 1998, but due to the lack of a signed formal funding agreement, progress in 1999 was limited to the creation of program by-laws and board structure, plus an unsuccessful attempt to hire a full-time program director. Once an agreement was executed in early 2000,

a second round of interviewing led to the hiring of the first, and only, program director of the MCEC, the drawdown of the first year's funding allotment from the USDA was made, and program activities proceeded with the formation of the program's Board of Directors and the redistribution of benchmark funding amounts to reflect the funding differential discussed previously.

Authors of the original EZ/EC application created the framework of benchmark categories that the program continues to utilize. From an analysis of input received during several town hall meetings and survey questionnaires, a set of priorities was identified that reflected the top issues and needs for comprehensive community development as voted by the community-at-large (Midwestern County Enterprise Community, 1998a). They were sorted into the following three broad categories:

- *Improved quality of life (QOL)*—focusing on the physical atmosphere; environment; land use and recreational planning; natural resource conservation; recycling; cultural sensitivity; cultural events; public and private transportation; volunteerism, plus; youth and senior activities,
- *Improved economic development (ED)*—targeting unemployment; economic diversity; job training; business and industry attraction/retention, small farm sustainability, and; small business assistance,
- *Improved family self-sufficiency (FSS), strengthened families and human services*—concentrating on domestic violence; homelessness; emergency services; family preservation; health care access and quality; housing conditions, and; vocational education.

MCEC leaders created 52 different programs, or benchmarks, that reflected the community assessment, and all but one, were retained in 2000 when the MCEC Board re-allocated funding at the reduced level. Additional benchmarks were created during the first five years of program operation in response to specific funding or new partnership opportunities that developed after 1998. These new focus areas addressed community safety issues as part of the QOL category, plus technological information barriers and community leadership development as part of the ED category. Several other benchmarks from the original group of 52 were deactivated due to the duplication evident when a single priority was represented by two distinct benchmarks. For example, the original list contained one benchmark (6.1) devoted to creating a county-wide art council and another (6.2) that covered the continued operation of that council. Currently, considering the effects of this churning activity that led to the addition and simultaneously, the deactivation of several benchmarks, the current MCEC menu of active, individual programs stands at 42. (See Appendix B, Tables 1-3 for a listing of all benchmarks and their summary information.)

B. Purpose and Objectives

Now at the projected mid-point of its ten-year designation, MCEC program key stakeholders (paid staff, community-based volunteers, and benchmark partners) agreed to participate in a formative evaluation process that would first review the past and current operation of the program, and then use that information, along with a strategic futuring analysis, to create a new action plan for its remaining five-year term. As such, this dissertation's primary objectives

include: 1) a description of the underlying rationale that contributed to the study's evolving design and implementation, and; 2) a presentation and discussion of the findings from that process designed to summarize, interpret, and reflect on the observations I made as a result of working closely with the program's stakeholders over a six-month period of time.

C. Significance

From a national perspective, this study adds to the literature regarding the community building outcomes of various rural communities that first received EZ or EC designations in the mid-to-late 1990s. This project attempts to reduce the discrepancy of research between the more studied urban EZ/ECs funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and less frequently analyzed rural EZ/EC designates sponsored by the USDA. This work presents the Midwestern County experience as a model of a community-based coalition building process that other rural communities can replicate, or customize, if facing similar socioeconomic circumstances. It also offers the stakeholders and funders of those same complex programs a framework that provides a cost-effective set of methods by which to evaluate these initiatives in a relatively short period of time. At the local level, leaders will use this study's findings as a basis to promote the program's operation and benefit to local residents and other partners at the regional, state, and national levels. They will also use a new, shared understanding of the program's past operation to better inform the future direction of the EC's outputs and outcomes.

D. Conceptual Framework

This study evaluates a complex community building program primarily designed to change the lives of Midwestern County residents in a positive manner by holistically addressing the multiple needs identified by community members in 1998. One way to assess the degree of that intended change is to focus on the existing meaning schemes that stakeholders employ as they plan and implement the various program activities created to produce specific outcomes in the community. Of critical interest in that process is how and why those perceptions change over time and what action is taken by the individuals, and correspondingly, by the program in response.

Given that focus, I utilized *Constructivist Theory* (CT) as a conceptual frame for this study. CT values an actively reflective process that serves as a key to learning from experience. It involves three phases: 1) identification of assumptions that underlie thoughts and action, 2) scrutiny as to the accuracy of those assumptions with regard to how they align with experience, and 3) a revisiting and restating of those assumptions to make them more inclusive and representative of experience (Dangel & Guyton, 2003; Tenant & Pogson, 1995; Brookfield, 1991). As such, CT is built on the concepts that learning is the integration of new information with prior knowledge and experience, and that process is affected by individual differences in ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, geographic location, and personal preferences for learning (Vermette, Foote, Bird, Mesibov, Harris-Ewing, and Battaglia; 2001).

Candy (1991) offers the following list of assumptions representing constructivist thought:

- People participate in the construction of reality.
- Construction occurs within a context that influences people.
- Construction is a constant activity that focuses on change and novelty rather than fixed conditions.
- Commonly accepted categories or understandings are socially constructed, not derived from observation.
- Given forms of understanding depend on the vicissitudes of social processes, not on the empirical validity of the perspective.
- Forms of negotiated understanding are integrally connected with other human activities.
- The “subjects” of research should be considered as “knowing” beings.
- Locus of control resides within the subjects themselves, and complex behavior is constructed purposefully.
- Human beings can attend to complex communications and organize complexity rapidly.
- Human interactions are based on intricate social rules, the rules governing which are often implicit rather than overt (p. 256).

CT adheres to subjectivist reasoning that is based on interpretation. That philosophy can be contrasted with a positivistic, or objectivist, perspective that is based on the logic of discovery (Arseneau & Rodenburg, 1998; Pratt, 1998).

Knowledge in CT terms is a product of social and individual assumptions that is

developed, reinforced, or changed through language, while knowledge from the objectivist's viewpoint consists of verifiable facts about the world that can be derived directly from observation and experimentation (Candy, 1991; Fisher, 1991). In the former, truth and reality are constructed according to the relationship between the observer and the observed while the positivistic perspective believes that reality exists "out there," independent of the individual and ready to be discovered.

E. Research Question

What can be learned from a systematic analysis of the first phase of a rural community building initiative that can be utilized by that program's stakeholders to improve the program's performance in addressing comprehensive community change in the final term of the program?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the core assumptions of the national EC program is the belief that rurally impoverished communities can be transformed by purposefully employing a community building model using collaborative action methods. On a broader scale, community building is often identified as an overarching goal by many community leaders, in urban neighborhoods and rural areas alike, who face unacceptable rates of citizen poverty, crime, income, health services, unemployment, or any other number of statistics that indicate a poor standard of living for residents (Joseph & Levy, 2002). However, the path to successful creation and the sustained operation of collaborative initiatives is littered with best intentions. Several factors contribute to this lack of success, such as the reliance on a long-term vision and corresponding high cost of program operation; lack of a concrete process to follow due to the uniqueness of each local situation, and; the difficult requirement that individuals and community service providers change their operating paradigms from one that measures success by cooperative, not competitive, standards (Tukahashi & Smutny, 2001; Wolff, 2001; Council of State Community Development Agencies, 1997).

A. Community Building

Community building, in *Community Building Coming of Age* by Kingsley, McNeely and Gibson (2001), works by:

...building community in individual neighborhoods: neighbors learning to rely on each other, working together on concrete tasks that take advantage of new self-awareness of their collective and individual assets and, in the process, creating human, family, and

social capital that provides a new base for a more promising future and reconnection to America's mainstream (p. 3).

The authors also identify common themes of more successful grass roots coalition building initiatives, four of which are useful for this analysis. They are:

- *Utilize specific improvement projects to build and reinforce resident values and strengthen social capital networks*—these programs create long-term goals and measurable objectives that are designed to build trust, enhance resident friendships, and increase community leadership. Often short-term projects are designed and implemented so that participants experience incremental levels of success that enhance motivation to engage in the long-term aspects of the initiative.
- *Are community-driven by residents*—it is imperative that community members are meaningfully involved in creating the original improvement plan, in implementing those strategies, and in the evaluation of those activities. This work does not represent a more traditional “expert” model of community development by which local leaders contract with an outside-the-community expert(s) to assess a local problem and offer solutions; all within in a very short timeframe and with no longitudinal requirement on the part of the expert(s) to address the reliability of those recommendations.
- *Employ comprehensive and entrepreneurial strategies*—these programs are emergent in their design and implementation, meaning that stakeholders do not have a blueprint or specific action plan to follow. Poor families face a wide range of interconnected socioeconomic problems. Many community-based service providers now realize that they serve the same set of clients. Given

the current landscape resulting in the slow growth of funding resources, these agencies have less time and money available to handle the increased demand for their programs. Therefore, community building initiative planners need to explore new ways of filling service gaps in some situations and eliminating duplicate programs in others.

- *Follow an asset-based philosophy*—Kretzman and McKnight (1993) claim that one of the best tools to achieve success in comprehensive community initiatives is for stakeholders to move away from the more traditional needs-based focus, where a community dwells upon its problems and deficits, to a capacity-focused perspective, where the assets of the community from an individual, association, and institution levels are first identified and then utilized to build new collaborative relationships.

While most of those principles are represented in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, the legislation that led to the establishment of the first round of EZ/EC program designations, the tenet regarding the perceived effectiveness of citizen empowerment in sustaining community development carried the greatest weight. Defined as a process that enables low-income citizens to improve their communities by means of continued, increasingly more active involvement in decision making and implementation of projects, empowerment is realized through the following strategies:

- *Increasing economic opportunities*—by focusing on the creation and retention of job opportunities plus training citizens for more rewarding employment.

- *Planning sustainable development*—by diversifying the system of community-based services so that all citizens receive quality information and/or care in a timely fashion and that the delivery of the services is purposefully planned with their sustainability in mind.
- *Expanding community partnerships*—by transforming the behavior of community leaders who follow a "turf" philosophy favoring self-interest and isolation into utilizing a more collaborative approach that recognizes the synergetic value of other partners at all levels—local, regional, state and federal—through the practices of negotiation and compromise.
- *Using funds as "gap-fillers"*—by investing EC monies only as seed capital as part of projects that have attracted additional partners (Reid & Flora, 2002; Flora, 2001; Reid & Murray, 2000; Reid, 1999).

B. Collaboration

To be successful, community building emphasizes a process that uses collaborative action. According to Gray (1989), in *Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems*, collaboration promotes a process of joint decision making among key stakeholders in regards to a problem domain that focuses on the future of that domain. Five features are critical to the process: (1) stakeholders are interdependent, (2) solutions emerge by dealing constructively with differences, (3) joint ownership of decisions is emphasized, (4) stakeholders assume collective responsibility for the future direction of the domain, and (5) it is treated as an emergent exercise.

Considerable literature has been devoted to categorizing and describing collaborative initiatives at the community level by type; traits and characteristics of members; critical importance of and type of leadership skills required; stages of development; communication strategies; funding type and levels, and; challenges to sustainability (Hyman, 2002; Joseph & Levy, 2002; Daniels & Walker, 2001; Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson & Allen, 2001; Wolff, 2001; Council of State Community Development Agencies, 1997).

For this study, prior studies and theories regarding team member characteristics were helpful in understanding the operation of the MCEC. Factors affecting short- and long-term collaborative effectiveness include: individual member operating personality given the team's mission and task(s), type and length of experience, power, values and motivation. Also, previous studies of successful collaborating teams point to the fact that a mixture of several types of individual styles, range of skills, and experience are important contributors to the success of a particular team (Fowler, 1995). Belbin (1981) created a typology of team member types that included: *coordinator* (mature and confident); *shaper* (dynamic and outgoing); *team worker* (perceptive and accommodating); *completer* (careful and conscientious), and; *specialist* (entrepreneurial) and suggested that most effective teams contain a cross section of those member operating styles.

MCEC leadership also was an important program performance variable to consider when examining and analyzing the MCEC Phase I (first five years) collaboration success. W.K. Kellogg Foundation's *Leadership: Building Capacity*

to Lead a Community-based Process: Developing Community Capacity (1998b)

handbook offers a list of attributes of successful collaborative leaders. Those traits include:

- *Flexibility*—willing to adapt the process of mediating different stakeholder self-interests for the good of the whole program,
- *Systems thinking*—ability to see the big picture; employ a general systems approach that practices an ecological perspective where changes within one environment will ultimately effect other systems in possibly unforeseen ways,
- *Trustworthiness*—promises that are made are honored and no commitment is made without a thoughtful process of weighing cost vs. benefit—given the high value of time,
- *Patience*—progress in a long-term initiative is measured in small steps and the process is often frustrating if viewed only from a short-term perspective,
- *Abundant energy and hope*—that are shared with stakeholders in a natural, unforced manner.

C. Sub-theories

While not all inclusive, the following list of theories assisted my work in iterative cycle of appraising, reflecting, designing, implementing and evaluating this study:

- *Social capital theory*—as defined as the potential to access resources through social relations (Lin, 1999; Coleman, 1990; Bourdieu, 1986).

Paramount to this assumption is the opinion that through the network of social

ties, individuals and/or groups can improve the efficiency of society or a particular system by facilitating coordinated action (Lin, Cook & Burt, 2001). One of the primary objectives of all rural EZ/ECs, as directed by the national program legislation, is the enhancement of the network of relationships between local, regional, state and federal partners by developing a shared future, engaging in collective action to deliver sustainable community services—alternately termed building community social capital (Putman, 1993). Components of a community's social capital include *bonding* that examine connections among individuals and groups with similar backgrounds, experience and interests within the community, and *bridging* that looks at relationships connecting various diverse groups within a community to similarly interested groups outside its typical boundaries (Flora & Flora, 2004). Using this framework, the goal of most comprehensive community change initiatives is to work to build and retain high levels of both bonding and bridging types of social capital, as they tend to reinforce each other.

- *Exchange theory*—with its focus on human behavior plus the nature and dynamics of relationships regarding their formation, maintenance, stability and breakdown, this theory addresses the ways individuals and groups select different relationships and why they choose differing levels of involvement according to such concepts as reciprocity, fairness, commitment, trust, satisfaction, power, rewards, costs and expectations (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993). Emerson's approach (1962) to exchange network analysis is especially applicable in its recognition that the nature of an individual's

relational ties, rather than personal attributes, lead to a clearer, more accurate understanding of a particular social system's distribution of power, dependence, or balance. In this study's situation, this perspective assisted me as I made, interpreted, and triangulated observations regarding the motivating rationale of the stakeholders and other community leaders involved with the program.

- *Human ecology theory*—as it focuses on the relationship of humans with the environment at multiple levels of interaction, it states that the family ecosystem is a subset of the human ecosystem and any change to any aspect in how the family system interacts with the natural, human constructed, or social systems results in modification to all other systems (Griffore & Phenice, 2001; Connard & Novick, 1996). Taken with the language of a *general systems* approach, these sets of theories provide the basis by which humans can be studied and analyzed as a function of their relationships and reciprocal interaction with the total set of subsystems within their environment. They are based on the belief that the well-being of individuals and families must be considered in context with the rest of the ecosystem in which they operate (Griffore & Phenice, 2001; Keith, 2000; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Bulbolz & Sontag, 1993). This holistic approach is critical to investigating, understanding, and interpreting the operation of a comprehensive community development program as it addresses quality of life, economic development, and family self-sufficiency issues simultaneously.

- *Organizational change theory*—the existence of unpredictable, uncertain, and highly turbulent environmental conditions are often a precursor for an organization to retool its strategies involving the quality and timeliness of its response to potential change options (Senge, 1990). These organizations begin to value their inherent capacity to adapt to unforeseen situations by identifying and learning from their own experiences, shifting their shared mindsets, and changing more quickly, broadly, and deeply than ever before. (Kubish, Auspos, Brown, Chaskin, Fulbright-Anderson & Hamilton, 2002; Loo, 2002 Rowden, 2001). Rowden (2001) outlines several models of organizational change, but the fourth—the learning organization, in which “...everyone communicates and works together creating enormous intelligence and flexibility to deal with rapidly-changing environments” is most applicable to this study. Given the scarcity of resources available to Midwestern County in terms of money, time, and people willing to volunteer as leaders—combined with the fierce competition for community development grants and other forms of assistance that now exists for all rural areas— the ability to either predict threats, or identify and respond to new opportunities in a timely, informed way, i.e., as a learning organization, is of critical importance to its continued success in enhancing citizen’s quality of life standards in a comprehensive manner (Housing Assistance Council, 2002; Quigley, 2002).
- *Evaluation theory*—with its basic assumption that “changes in social programs result from thousands of accumulated small inputs,” this approach

advocates that any evaluation study must deal with the historical beginnings, political context, current and anticipated changes in policy, plus the often conflicting wants, expectations, and assumptions of the various stakeholder groups at the time of initial design and throughout the life of the program (Rossi, Freeman & Lipsey, 1999; Shadish, Cook & Leviton, 1991). Program evaluation assumes that social problem solving is improved by a combination of making incremental improvements to existing programs, by creating better or innovative designs for new programs, and/or by terminating poorly performing programs and replacing them with those that follow a more innovative, but proven effective, strategy (Shadish et al., 1991). Furthermore, evaluation methods should respond to the audience's need for information rather than some predetermined set of variables, and a participatory approach is recommended that insists the consumers of the evaluation's findings be an integral part of the design and implementation of the study (Kubish et al, 2002; Flora, Gasteyer, Fernandez-Baca, Banerji, Bastian, & Aleman, 2000; Brown, 1999). As such, evaluation represents a constantly-evolving process that should be employed not as a one-time event, but instead, made an integral component at all stages of a program's life that is utilized on a regular basis for purposes of reflection and improvement of program performance (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1997; Wholey, 1977).

This type of evaluation adheres to the following principles:

- *Allows important program variables to emerge*—it accommodates ongoing changes in the program, focuses on observing stakeholder interaction, and

uses a variety of data gathering methods (e.g., observation, interviews, secondary data analyses, etc.) to confirm and report multiple views about what people think is good and bad regarding the program (Shadish et al., 1991). In sum, the emphasis in responsive evaluation is on flexibility in all stages; in design, in the type of research questions investigated, in fieldwork, and even in writing the final report.

- *Encourages change efforts in local stakeholders*—during a formative evaluation, the task of identifying issues and/or improving program practice is a task best handled by local stakeholders (Cronbach, 1980). Stake (1975) said,

It is much more likely that whatever truths, whatever solutions there are, exist in the minds of people who are running the program, those participating in the program, those patrons of the program...He [the evaluator] is making his greatest contribution, I think, when he is helping people discover ideas, answers, solutions, within their own minds.

- *Increases local control*—this type of evaluation of social programs is described as a social process by which professional knowledge, local knowledge, process and research skills, plus democratic values serve as the basis of co-created knowledge and eventual social change (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). Therefore, in lieu of acting as an expert model, the evaluator becomes more of a “friendly outsider” who purposefully changes his/her behavior according to the situation at hand. These roles alternately include facilitator, silent observer, active encourager, historian, coach, and occasionally, an expert (Edleson & Bible, 1998; Shadish et al.; 1991).

This set of evaluation theories act as one of the cornerstones of this study, and lay the groundwork for utilizing an action research approach that will be outlined in the methods section of this dissertation (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

D. Evaluating Community Building Initiatives

A study that utilizes a responsive and participatory approach fits well with the demands of evaluating comprehensive community building initiatives. These programs never follow a prescribed process, maintain a long-term focus, and rely on building/sustaining a network of communitywide alliances represented by many service providers who previously have not worked collaboratively. One report, funded by the Ann E. Casey Foundation (Joseph & Levy, 2002), presents a list of key insights offered by field staff regarding barriers encountered in implementing comprehensive community development program plans:

- Program theory and corresponding assumptions should be actively identified early in the program. All stakeholders, including local participants and funders, should be asked to clarify expectations by stating specific outcomes that would result from the program.
- Program implementers should not spread their efforts too thinly and utilize a “small wins” philosophy which results in early success and the stakeholder buy-in needed for addressing the more long-term, complex objectives.
- Sustainable revitalization is accomplished only by leveraging the outside funds initially made available from comprehensive community building programs with increases in the local pool of private investment. Funding

should be viewed as “seed” capital that leads to the development of new financial and human capital sources so that the community can address long-term change of complex issues.

- Effective leadership is critical at all levels of operation and participation. Existing community leaders should be purposefully identified in the initial stages of the program and potential leaders also should be recruited, trained in leadership techniques, and engaged in program activities.
- For government to change its “business as usual” behavior and share power with local residents regarding how and in what way community services are offered, those community-based representatives must reciprocate by assuming a more proactive, constructive stance in their relationship with the government officials as well (Joseph & Ley, 2002).

Other factors, listed below, speak to the difficulty of evaluating grass roots coalition building projects:

- *Horizontal complexity*—projects involve delivery of services on a cross-sectional basis and therefore present a complex set of activities and outcomes to measure.
- *Vertical complexity*—projects attempt to create change at multiple levels of individual, family, organization, and community systems. Outcomes at each level interact with all other subsystems to present a complex set of activities and objectives to measure.

- *Broad range of outcomes*—the inherent horizontal and vertical complexity described above will necessitate the need to create multidimensional outcome measures that are difficult to operationalize and interpret.
- *Flexible and evolving intervention*—the emergent nature of these initiatives makes measuring/evaluating the evolutionary process difficult. Also, contextual issues add considerable complexity to the evaluation project as each community has its unique set of issues, plus financial, human, and social networks (Kubish et al., 2002; Weiss, 1999; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1997).

E. Logic Models and Program Theory of Change

Logic models are diagrams, or visual maps, that show how a program works from a holistic point of view, highlighting the theory and assumptions that serve as a foundation for values and principles, plus linking short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes with program activities (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 1998a, 2001). In program planning, the construction of a logic model is useful for creating a shared vision illustrating the anticipated theory of change that represents how a program's group of stakeholders intend to transform their community over time (Weiss, 2003). It also assists in evaluating a program by providing a visual representation of the relationship between planned activities and targeted outcomes, and thereby, encourages stakeholder dialog and/or discourse. That communicative action focuses on the program's degree of success in accordance with their expectations regarding the desired outcomes of incremental change (Birckmayer & Weiss, 2000). Given the high utility that logic

models demonstrate in illustrating complex programs, this dissertation employs two such models for descriptive and interpretive purposes. Each map is aligned with an objective (listed on page 6). Figure 1 (see page 25) represents the various components, plus the manner in which they relate, in designing and executing my theory of change regarding this MCEC mid-term evaluation study, and Figure 2 (see page 26) reflects my perception of the interrelationship between MCEC stakeholder assumptions, external factors that influence the program operation, resources available, activities, outputs and outcomes. Essentially, Figure 1 illustrates my personal meaning schemes associated with my work with the MCEC and Figure 2 depicts the stakeholder learning evident in the Phase I operation of the program. For clarity, further discussion regarding the first objective and its corresponding logic model (Figure 1), will be labeled EP (Evaluation Process), while any mention of the second objective and its corresponding logic model (Figure 2) will be categorized as AE (Actual Evaluation of the MCEC program).

Figure 1. Evaluation Process (EP) Logic Model of Midwestern County Enterprise Community (MCEC) Mid-Term Evaluation

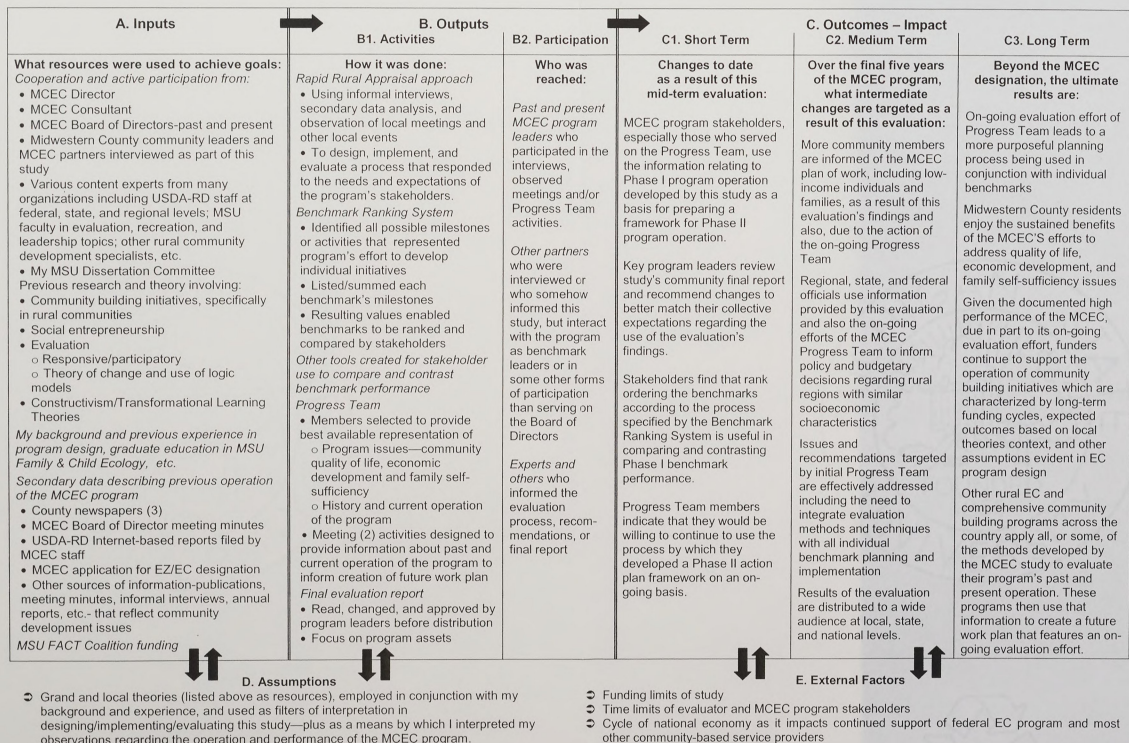
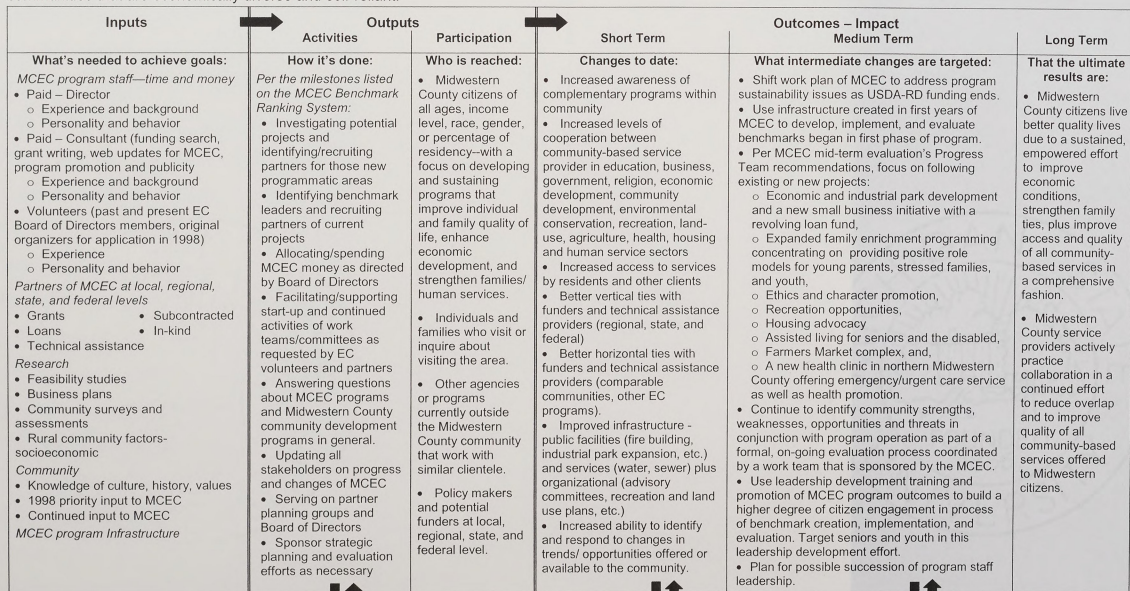


Figure 2. Actual Evaluation Logic Model of Midwestern County Enterprise Community (MCEC) Program

MCEC mission statement (created by evaluation Progress Team, 5/4/2004, pending review by MCEC Board of Directors): Through an empowered grass roots effort and regional cooperation, Midwestern County citizens will improve the quality of life for all, conserve natural resources and promote further development of vibrant communities that are economically diverse and self-reliant.



Assumptions

- ◉ Value of collaboration process in community building programs
- ◉ Constructivist theory
- ◉ Transformational learning theory
- ◉ Evaluation theory
- ◉ Regarding EZ/EC principles—effectiveness of seed money in leveraging funds, regionalism, building partners, etc

External Factors

- ◉ National EZ/EC program principles
- ◉ National economic recession at start of designation, currently in recovery or expansion, corresponding reduction in community-based service programs
- ◉ Change in federal administration policy regarding rural and community building programs / undetermined impact of upcoming presidential elections
- ◉ Entire length of project—various mandates and laws from state and federal governments specifying service requirements (e.g., No Child Left Behind or minimum wage laws)

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CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Population

This study's population is represented by the group consisting of all comprehensive, community building initiatives across the United States. The MCEC program, with its past and present stakeholders, acts as a sample of that population. That subset of stakeholders consists of, but are not excluded by:

- USDA-RD and other funding or technical assistance partners who work with the Midwestern County program and are associated with the EZ/EC program on a national, state, regional and local levels,
- Midwestern County community-based agency administrative, management and field staff responsible for delivering social, health, education, community development, business, religious, government, and/or human services to all income groups, but most particularly low-income families and individuals
- MCEC program paid staff and volunteers,
- Other resident groups, leaders, and visitors not specifically listed above (e.g., youth, media, and retirees).

B. Methods

As previously stated, a research project that studies the historical beginnings, present conditions, and future expectations of a comprehensive community building initiative such as the MCEC program requires an approach that is responsive and participatory. Design and implementation strategies of such inquiries keep stakeholder needs, values, and expectations at the forefront,

and studies of this type are often perceived more as a value to the community rather than as a critical analysis with generalizable results (Stake, 1975). The Midwestern County evaluation reflects that mission as it: (1) addressed the immediate needs of the community and program leaders by producing tools that enabled stakeholders to compare and contrast the operation of individual benchmarks, (2) used that information to engage key stakeholders in a systematic process aimed at taking action by developing a strategic plan for the program's future operation, and (3) created logic models and a community final report that provided mechanisms for the stakeholders to reflect, reach consensus or enter into discourse regarding the desired change they want to accomplish via the program's activities.

This form of inquiry is considered part of an action research framework that endorses case study techniques as a viable, effective methodology (Shadish et al., 1991). Action research, according to Greenwood and Levin (1998), "generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis," and therefore:

- Is context bound and addresses real life problems,
- Is inquiry where participants and researchers co-generate knowledge through communicative processes in which all input is valued,
- Treats the diversity of experience and capacities of local stakeholders as an opportunity for the enrichment of the research action process,
- Recognizes that meanings constructed in the inquiry process lead to social action,

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- Measures credibility-validity according to whether actions that arise from it solve problems and/or increase participant's control over their own situation (p. 75-76).

It is difficult to dichotomize the methods of action research from those regarding the practice of participatory, responsive evaluation. One key area of difference, however, is that the action research process does not stop with observation, nor interpretation of the targeted sample's behavior, no matter how valid. Instead, that information must be used as an agent by which to change or transform the group of study focus (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

C. Data Collection Tools

This study employed an evolving design and implementation process meant first, to yield a viable interpretation of the MCEC's first phase of operation as it interacted with its multiple environments, and second, to utilize that new information to develop a Phase II program plan of operation. That effort was guided by a set of similar methodologies alternately termed Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal, and Rapid Feedback Evaluation (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Kumar, 1993; Shadish et al., 1991). While each approach recommends a slightly different set of data collection methods that varies according to several dimensions (such as motivating rationale, target population, allotted time to perform project, and/or amount of available funding), all advocate for the use an evolving design process that features the participation of the program's key stakeholders while striving to maintain an environment of

openness and dialogue (Armson, Ison, Short, Ramage, & Reynolds, 2001; Greene, 1994). The core appraisal methods menu includes key informant interviews, focus group meetings, community interviews, structured direct observation, secondary data analyses, and informal surveys (Kumar, 1993; Shadish et al., 1991). The final selection of data collection methods responds to the needs dictated by the emerging design process previously described per discussions between the evaluator and program stakeholders who assisted with the evaluation planning effort.

In the case of the MCEC program evaluation, I became familiar with the components of the program's operation over a six-month period of time through a series of interviews with local leaders, observation of community-based meetings, secondary data analyses, and two strategic futuring workshops. The evaluation planning team--which consisted of the MCEC director, the paid consultant and several volunteers, and myself--collaborated on most aspects of design and implementation of the study. The action component of the process was represented by the work of the strategic futuring group, called the *Progress Team*. That group used the information compiled and analyzed by the evaluation regarding the program's history and current operation, combined with a trends and vision analysis, to create a new action plan framework for the next phase of the MCEC.

Several tools were developed specifically for the evaluation that were designed to assist the program's stakeholders to better understand how the

individual projects, or benchmarks, performed in relation to each other during the first phase of the program.

This emphasis on flexibility was evident as I visited the community at least twice a week over a six-month period and alternately filled each day with interviewing stakeholders, attending partner meetings, plus reading newspapers and other sources that described the history of the community and of the MCEC program. As I traveled about the county and came to an understanding of how the program operated within the context of Midwestern County leader and citizen meaning perceptions, the following sets of resources contributed to the process:

1) *General social science theories and other assumptions* - that implicitly, or explicitly, guide the program (as listed previously in conceptual framework and literature review sections of this paper). Using constructivist theory as a template, they offer an overriding conceptual foundation by which to frame the iterative process I followed in performing this study. Other perspectives (identified as sub-theories in the literature review section) provide an explanation, a set of predictions, and/or generalizations concerning how the world operates from an ecological point-of-view in relation to Midwestern County and its various subsystems (Creswell, 1998).

2) *Local theories* – as used by MCEC program stakeholders in providing guidance to their efforts as they address how to best create, implement, evaluate and sustain community change. Termed local knowledge by Greenwood and Levin (1998, p.111), my interpretation of these assumptions was based upon my ability to establish in-depth, credible relationships with

the key program leaders. Also critical to the accuracy of my translation of local theory was the study's participants' understanding of the motivating rationale behind my questions and presence, plus the perceived value they attached to the study in regard to the program and to the community, i.e., their degree of buy-in to the study's process and purpose (Creswell, 1998; Dick, 1998; Adler & Adler, 1994; Denzin, 1989).

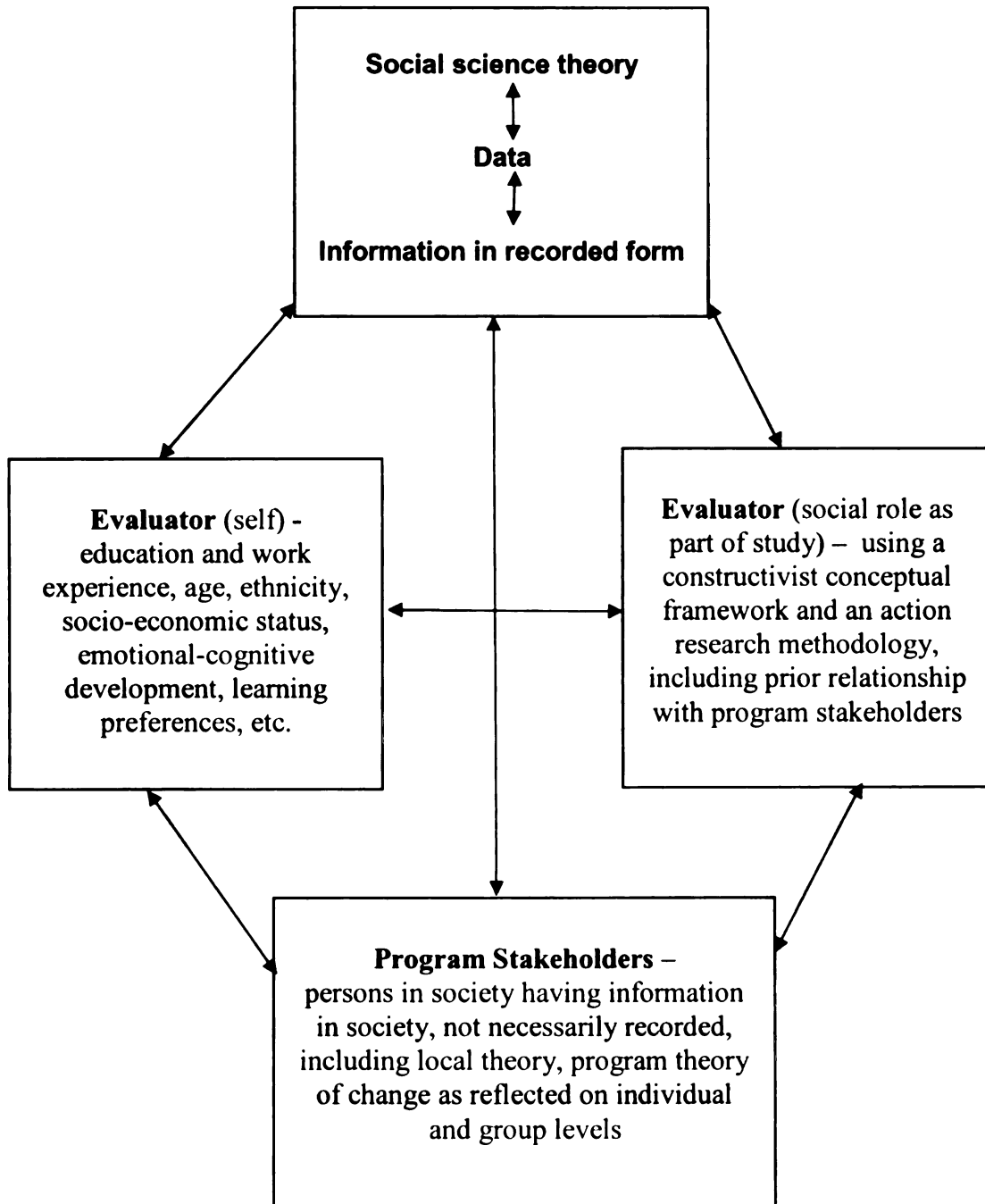
3) *My personal characteristics and background* - that acted as a lens by which I filtered all of my decisions regarding EP activities, plus my observations made while interacting with program stakeholders representing the AE portion of this report. Those variables include: family, work, and education background and experience; indicators of personal preference (for instance, world view, political, and religious values); age; socioeconomic status, gender, race, and extent of prior evaluation experience (Deshler, 1998).

Figure 3 (see page 33) illustrates the previously described, interrelated components representing the cycle of inquiry that I utilized in performing this study.

The last category, listed above, represents a source of bias in my effort to present the truest possible reality regarding the operation of the MCEC (Denzin, 1989; Shadish et al., 1991). Therefore, the following description of my background and experience with the MCEC program is warranted so that the reader is better informed of the basis of my decisions, interpretations, and judgments regarding this report's AE findings (Janesick, 1994).

Figure 3 – MCEC Program Evaluation Cycle of Inquiry

Adapted from Junker (1960), The Field Work Situation of Observation (p. 10)



D. My Prior Experience with MCEC Program

I was the manager of a university-based rural community development project in 1998 when Midwestern County leaders asked the project's principal investigators to assist them with prioritizing the community issues as part of the EZ/EC application process. I attended two meetings at that time in Midwestern County and became acquainted with several leaders of the community. Shortly after the MCEC director was hired in early 2000, he and I (still serving as manager of that same project) planned several activities focusing on small business assistance and senior rural issues identification in that region. In 2001, I assumed my current position as statewide housing program leader for a university Extension department and quickly found myself working with the MCEC again due to its considerable number of housing-related benchmarks. In the summer of 2003, I approached the director with a proposal to evaluate the MCEC program as part of my doctoral dissertation. The director accepted, asked the Board and received its approval in the fall of that year, and the study officially began in January 2004.

It is evident by that account that I entered this evaluation project with a predisposed positive bias regarding the program's operation. That opinion was formed as a result of my long-term, direct contact with the MCEC that led to a friendly, but business-like, relationship with the program's executive director. It also was formed due to the comments of other community development specialists who often spoke favorably of the program's operation and success in obtaining the EC designation. I also appreciated the ability of the program to

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attract new partners and leverage considerable sums of new funding to the community, given my lack of success attempting to do the same as a housing program leader at the state level.

E. Balancing Bias with Purposeful Investigation

To ensure a high degree of accuracy regarding the interpretation of observations, I made a specific effort to neutralize my positive perception of the program by employing the systematic methods framed by a case-study approach. This methodology advocates the purposeful investigation of a unit of human activity as it is embedded in the real world with the understanding that the activity can only be studied and analyzed in a fashion that merges it with its context (Gillhan, 2000; Yin, Bateman, & Moore, 1983). Much the same as techniques used in a court of law, evidence in case study research is gathered via multiple methods in order to corroborate any interpretation, finding, or conclusion regarding observed phenomena. This tactic, termed *triangulation*, along with establishing a formal database and having the draft final report reviewed by key informants, increases construct validity of a case study (Yin, 1994). Using the set of rapid appraisal techniques described previously (see pages 29-30) as a guide, sources of evidence that contributed to the triangulation goal for this project included:

- *Documentation*—the meeting sign-in sheets from the 1998 application process, agendas and minutes from MCEC meetings and other community-based events; letters of support and other program communication; benchmark proposals for funding and other applications; program progress reports to the

USDA, reports and information from the USDA's Internet-based benchmark database, and; newspaper articles from the three county newspapers. All of this secondary data analysis was reviewed in an inductive manner looking for themes and patterns regarding how the program operated and fit within other community development initiatives in the county.

- *Archival records*—such as comparison of county-based statistics between the 1990 and 2000 US Census records; maps and charts created by state and regional planning and economic development organizations, plus; MCEC partner publications involving clients served, mission, and performance,

- *Physical artifacts*—including my visits to two newly developed industrial parks that featured MCEC-supported infrastructure improvements, a new farmers' market building, and new shelters to serve the area's homeless, transitional and abused populations,

- *Interviews*—semi-structured using open-ended questions so that I was free to adapt the discussion as needed to better understand the nature and quality of the relationship of those interviewed with the MCEC program (Morse, 1998). I followed a primary selection of informants technique that favored a maximum variety sampling methodology (Patton, 1990). That technique guided me as I first deliberately selected a heterogeneous sample of participants, noted their common experience regarding MCEC operation across their diverse community roles and experiences, and then used that information to select a new round of informants who could confirm or disconfirm those initial interpretations (Morse, 1998). For instance, many of my initial conversations regarding the

history and current operation of the program took place with the program's director. His opinions were solicited regarding such factors as partner participation, funding options, and individual benchmark performance. My observations reflecting his opinions were noted, and then offered as points of comparison, or contention, during subsequent stakeholder interviews. This triangulating process continued until my investigation yielded little new information, or alternative perspectives, regarding that particular issue.

A similar cycle was followed to investigate most of the themes represented by the individual benchmarks within the categories of economic development, quality of life, and family self-sufficiency. The iterative process led to a series of interviews whereby a wide range of interests were represented, including the fields of education, human services, library services, job training, business, community development, economic development, agriculture, government (township and county levels), lending, housing, career development, religion, and youth services; state and national leaders in agriculture, housing, small business development, senior population policy development, community development, recreation, rural policy, and community planning, plus; research in recreation, seasonal homes, senior programming, community capacity building, small business development, community planning and leadership development.

- *Observation*—throughout the study, I made the purpose (MCEC program evaluation) behind my attendance of an event known to other participants at the outset of those various events. The goal of adhering to this *participant-as-observer* role ultimately was to develop in-depth relationships with key

stakeholders over time and so, gain a more complete understanding of the past and present operation of the program (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 1994; Denzin, 1989). In this study, I attended numerous meetings of MCEC program teams and of its partners over the six-month period of time. Those meetings included: MCEC Board of Directors; MCEC Executive Committee; the low-income citizen empowerment board of directors; the county's human services coordinating body; several local and regional economic development agencies; homeless assistance advocates; the county-based housing service provider collaborative; the county commission, and; this study's sponsored Progress Team.

Not only did the protocol of the MCEC program evaluation respond to the demand for multi-source evidence gathering as a means to increase construct validity, but it also addressed reliability issues by purposefully incorporating techniques meant to maintain case-study quality, including: investigator skills (e.g., good listening; identify bias, ability to integrate relevant observations and data using synthesis skills, and; willingness to adapt as required by emerging stakeholder issues and expectations); treatment of participants (obtaining human subject consent and permission from participants prior to interviews and meetings, for example); treatment of data (for instance, transcribing Progress Team meetings discussion, see Appendix A); creation and organization of the computer database that represents all of the individual benchmarks histories regarding many variables, including funds allocated, number of partners, amount of MCEC money expended and total dollars leveraged (see Appendix B for Benchmark Summary Sheets, Tables B1-B3) plus; writing and reporting findings

(e.g., actively entertaining alternative perspectives; providing a sense of completeness that all forms of data are examined, and; providing a draft version of study's report to program stakeholders for review and validation) (Coffman, 2003; Gillham, 2000; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Naumes & Naumes, 1999; Yin, 1994).

F. Protocol

All USDA-sponsored community-building programs across the country are required to submit activity and outcome information via an Internet-based Benchmark Management System (BMS) on a regular basis. The MCEC program has performed very well in past comparisons to other programs on a national basis using statistics taken from that Web-based system. Most notably, the program was named the top Round 2 rural EC for the amount of leveraged money it was able to attract to the community in 2003 (USDA, 2003). The BMS serves a very useful purpose in assisting individual ECs in charting progress, recording accomplishments, and as a tool by which to compare and contrast their program's outcomes against other EZ/ECs on a national basis. However, because it attempts to track so many programs that each represent a tremendous divergence of goals and objectives, the BMS falls short in collecting information that tells the unique story regarding the local context, history, values and other variables that contribute to the rich fabric of an individual program's development and implementation. That task—to weave the underlying contextual factors that have influenced the first phase performance of the MCEC into the

story of its operation—was one of the primary tasks that the program's stakeholder wanted the mid-term evaluation to address.

With that contextual directive in mind, I consulted with MCEC program staff and Board members at every phase of the study's design and implementation. That approach gave the evaluation's planning team the opportunity to identify obstacles as they became apparent, and to plan purposely how best to mitigate them to achieve the evolving goals and objectives of the project. Several such problems emerged and were addressed in this manner. The most perplexing of which centered upon the sheer complexity and tremendous volume of information generated by the various activities of 40-plus, active, individual projects. That collection of data representing the past, present, and anticipated future performance of the MCEC benchmarks is summarized and presented in the Benchmark Summary Tables (Please see Appendix B). Table B1 represents data regarding the Quality of Life (QOL) category, Table B2 details all of the Economic Development (ED) benchmarks, and Table B3 provides information for the entire set of the Self Sufficiency (SS) category's benchmarks. Statistics listed in those spreadsheets provide specific details regarding the program's:

- *Application stage*
 - 1998 money requested (columns E)
 - 1998 partners (columns F)
- *Present operation*
 - Total MCEC funding allocated/spent (columns G)

- Primary project or program to date (columns H)
 - Current leaders (columns I)
 - Total funding received (columns J)
 - In-kind funding received and contributing partners (columns K)
 - MCEC Board of Directors number of discussions during its monthly meetings pertaining to that particular benchmark (columns L)
 - *Future plans*
 - Short-term plan (one to two years) (columns P)
 - Intermediate-term plan (three to five years) (columns Q)
 - Long-term vision beyond the MCEC program designation (columns R)
1. Benchmark Ranking System

Another potential barrier that emerged early in the evaluation's design process was the difficulty experienced by the program's stakeholders when trying to rank or compare the widely diverse outputs and short-term outcomes generated by the numerous individual programs that constitute the MCEC program plan. A question illustrating that dilemma is: *How can the MCEC's effort made in the creation of a countywide, comprehensive master plan (Benchmark 1.1) be compared or rated against the accumulated activities that represent the work to upgrade the county's early warning siren system (Benchmark 23)?* The Benchmark Ranking System (BRS) was developed as a tool to address that problem. That instrument created a score for each benchmark that represented the sum of the various activities, or milestones, associated with their respective development. That index of milestones was created after considerable discussion

with the program's staff in an effort to identify all of the individual tasks that comprised the alternative paths of development of MCEC projects.

The goal in designing the BRS was that higher scoring benchmarks represented a greater effort and value to the community than a benchmark of a lower score. This was indeed the case as program stakeholders reported that the rank order of benchmarks via the BRS seemed to agree with their informal assessment regarding their perceived value of benchmarks to the community. As an illustration, the highest scoring benchmark (14.1) that led to the creation and operation of a county-based domestic abuse shelter garnered its points through the accumulated effect of most of the individual milestones listed on the BRS, including having a benchmark leader, being the focus of many MCEC Board of Director's meeting discussions, spending most of the MCEC funding allocated to it, creating an advisory team, working with a wide variety of partners, writing several funding proposals, winning grants from many different types of funders, and creating several types of strategic plans. Please see Appendix C for a copy of the BRS template.

2. Progress Team

The Progress Team used the Benchmark Summary sheets, BRS information, and corresponding Category Comparisons (see Table 1-pages 43-45) as a foundation to inform their work in developing a MCEC action plan for the next phase of the program. The group's members were selected through the same participatory process that marked the development of other evaluation

Table 1. Midwestern County Enterprise Community Category Comparisons

May 10 2004

Description	Improved Quality of Life (QOL)	Economic Development (ED)	Self-Sufficiency (SS)	Comment(s)
Total number of benchmarks- 1998 / 2004	15 / 11	15 / 11	24 / 20	Each strategic category has lost four benchmarks
Benchmark average score- TOTAL	17.45	19.3	12.75	Average based on all benchmarks in category
Benchmark average score not including "need to refocus" benchmarks	23.5	19.3	16.3	QOL-less 3; ED-none; SS-less 4
Quadrant – average	2.55	2.73	2.0	Quad 1 - Scores range 1-9; Quad 2 - 10-18; Quad 3 - 19-27; Quad 4 - 28-36 points.
Benchmark per quadrant breakdown	Quad. 1 - 4 (36%) Quad. 2 - 0 Quad. 3 - 4 (36%) Quad. 4 - 3 (27%)	Quad. 1 - 2 (18%) Quad. 2 - 2 (18%) Quad. 3 - 4 (36%) Quad. 4 - 3 (27%)	Quad. 1 - 9 (45%) Quad. 2 - 5 (25%) Quad. 3 - 3 (15%) Quad. 4 - 3 (15%)	QOL & ED tied for lead with % of benchmarks in top ½ - 63%; SS had greatest % in lower ½- 70%
Outside funding received	\$2,606,022	\$18,430,424	\$4,280,589	USDA-RD grants and loans for infrastructure improvements in several small Midwestern County cities make ED top category.
In-kind received	\$141,748	\$36,850	\$68,005	
% of benchmarks that received in-kind	45% (5 of 11)	36% (4 of 11)	35% (7 of 20)	
Total funding (outside + in-kind)	\$2,747,770	\$18,467,274	\$4,348,594	

Table 1 (cont'd)

Description	Improved Quality of Life (QOL)	Economic Development (ED)	Self-Sufficiency (SS)
EC \$ allocated	\$149,000	\$314,000	\$301,374
EC \$ spent	\$66,965	\$174,227	\$156,377
Percent EC \$ spent / allocated	44.9%	55.5%	51.9%
Quad. 1 – Total benchmarks (benchmark numbers)	4 (7.1, 7.2, 8.1, 10.2)	2 (13.3, 13.6)	9 (14.2, 15.1, 16.1, 18.2, 18.5, 19.1, 20.1, 20.2, 20.4)
-EC \$ spent / alloc. (as %)	\$0 / \$15,000 (0%)	\$0 / \$6,000 (0%)	\$0 / \$0 (0%)
-% EC \$ spent in Quad. 1 to- total EC \$ spent in category	0%	0%	0%
Quad. 2 – Total benchmarks (benchmark numbers)	0	2 (11.2, 13.1)	5 (17.1, 18.1, 18.9, 18.10, 20.3)
-EC \$ spent / alloc. (as %)	0 / 0 (0%)	\$0 / \$60,000 (0%)	\$10,000 / \$31,950 (31.3%)
-% EC \$ spent to total EC \$ spent in category	0%	0%	6.4% (\$10,000 / \$156,377)
Quad. 3 – Total benchmarks (benchmark numbers)	4 (1.1, 4.1, 10.1, 23)	4 (11.1, 11.3, 24, 13.2)	3 (16.2, 18.7, 18.8)
-EC \$ alloc. / EC \$ spent (%)	\$11,965 / \$36,000 (33%)	\$41,100 / \$65,000 (63%)	\$116,572 / \$156,619 (74%)
-% EC \$ spent (quad.) to total EC \$ spent in category	18% (\$11,965 / \$66,965)	23.6% (\$41,100 / \$174,227)	74.5% (\$116,572 / \$156,377)
Quad. 4 – Total benchmarks (#)	3 (2.1, 5.1, 6.1)	3 (11.5, 22, 12.2)	3 (14.1, 18.3, 18.4)
-EC \$ alloc. / EC \$ spent (%)	\$55,000 / \$98,000 (56%)	\$133,127 / \$183,000 (73%)	29,805 / \$68,805 (43%)
-% EC \$ spent (quad.) to total EC \$ spent in category	82% (\$55,000 / \$66,965)	76.4% (\$133,127 / \$174,227)	19.1% (\$29,805 / \$156,377)

Table 1. (cont'd)

Description	Improved Quality of Life (QOL)	Economic Development (ED)	Self-Sufficiency (SS)
Partners-Total	41	73	64
- Local (% of category total)	25 (61%)	30 (41%)	35 (55%)
- Regional (% of category total)	6 (14.5%)	19 (26%)	12 (19%)
- State (% of category total)	8 (19.5%)	10 (14%)	10 (16%)
- Federal (% of category total)	2 (5%)	14 (19%)	6 (9%)
Benchmark with greatest number of partners	5.1 (Improve recreational opportunities) 10 partners	22 (Address inform. barriers) 16 partners	18.4 (Work Camp) 12 partners
% Change in benchmark leadership 1998 to 2004	91% (10 of 11 changed)	45% (5 of 11; including 2 new benchmarks since 1998)	80% (16 of 20 changed)
Highest benchmark score per category	31 points – BM 2.1 (Improve natural resources)	31 points – BM 11.5 (County-wide econ. dev. organization)	35 points – BM 14.1 (Domestic violence center)
Lowest benchmark score per category	1 point (tie) – BM 7.1 (Brine well) & 7.2 (Amish tunnel)	2 points – BM 13.2 (Expand child care services)	1 point (tie) – 15.1 (Increase incentives to develop good work habits) & 20.2 (Satellite office for MM Health Park)
Highest benchmark score	-	-	35 points – BM 14.1 (Domestic violence center)
Highest funding received benchmark	-	BM 11.2 Expand / develop industrial park / infrastructure in a small city (\$12,374,650) -	-
Benchmark per category w/ most EC Board discussions	6.1 (Art Council) – 21 discussions	22 (Informational technology/barriers) - 30 discussions	18.8 (Homeless services) - 19 discussions

activities. Program leaders and I started the process by recommending names of individuals who: 1) were familiar with the MCEC's set of complex goals and objectives, 2) represented one or more of the program's target content areas, including K-12 (during and after school), vocational, and entrepreneurial education; economic/community development; human services; volunteerism, small business assistance; health care; housing; environmental conservation; recreation and tourism, and government services, and, 3) were available to attend the two meetings of five hours length over two consecutive weeks. In all, of those who were invited, the majority accepted. A facilitator from the state's primary economic development agency was recruited who also had considerable prior knowledge regarding the program's scope and history of development, but was not closely involved with its day-to-day operation.

The team spent the first day listening to an explanation regarding the various, previously described tools meant to provide an overview of the program's first phase of operation. Then it began to identify community-related strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (commonly called a SWOT analysis)—from both internal and external community perspectives—all of which would influence the MCEC's direction in the future. The first day of work concluded with a futuring session during which the team brainstormed possible macro economic and other trends that might impact the next generation of Midwestern County residents. The team's second day of work began with an overview of that SWOT analysis, a review of the top ten priorities taken from the EC application process in 1998 and revisiting the wording of the program's

original vision statement. Those activities were followed by several exercises designed to create a prioritized list of projects recommending broad areas of focus and/or specific projects that needed to be continued, expanded, and/or begun by the MCEC program in the future. The day concluded with the team creating a priority list of “top 10” projects, a brief action plan for most of those programs, and an estimate of the funding required to carry out those plans. See Appendix D: Table D1 - Progress Team Asset and Barrier Summary; Tables D2-D5 – 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2004 Futuring Sessions summaries; Table D6 – SWOT Analysis, and Table D7 – Priority Recommendations by the team.

G. Study Limitations

The limitations of this mid-term evaluation fall in three categories:

1) *The inability to generalize its community level findings to other comprehensive community building programs.* While I took deliberate steps to increase the accuracy of my interpretations regarding MCEC program operation, this evaluation’s design and implementation followed an emerging process that responded to the needs and expectations of the local stakeholders. In doing so, it would be very unlikely that the community level findings determined by such a process would apply to other community building programs.

2) *Lack of input from the MCEC’s primary funder.* The current political and economic landscapes at the national level is unsettled. That situation features a recent presidential election in which no one knows the level of support that either candidate, if elected, will provide to the EC program and an economy that continues to reflect slow job growth and a sluggish rebound from a recession.

That formula translates to the probable continuation of the trend that reflects flat, or reduced, operating budgets for most rural program providers, including the USDA. Over the course of this evaluation, I found no one within that organization who could provide concrete evidence concerning the EC program's immediate and long term future.

3) *My inexperience as a program evaluator.* Although I have completed several graduate level classes that have provided me with a good understanding of qualitative research methods, have experience in program design at a statewide level, and have worked with many community-based groups of volunteers in a similar capacity found in this study, this is the first evaluation project I have led. True to the literature that described community building initiatives as difficult to evaluate due to a number of factors, the complexity represented by the activities attributed to MCEC's menu of benchmarks was overwhelming at the onset of my work with the evaluation's planning team. The evolving nature of this type of investigation can be quite unnerving to someone who has not experienced the anxiety that results from not knowing exactly where the process outlined by action research will lead. That situation will be less formidable as I gain additional experience by working with other evaluators, by taking training that specializes in program evaluation methods, and by continuing to read other accounts regarding the evaluation of this type of program.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The utility of using logic models in portraying a program's theory of change and in illustrating the complex interactions of various components that operate within that program from a holistic perspective has been previously described. The following section will present those interrelating components from the EP and AE perspectives. Please note that this paper has already discussed a large portion of the EP model—as the information contained in the sections describing this evaluation's conceptual framework, literature review, methods and sample are represented by the model's each input (Columns A), and output (Columns B1 for activities and B2 for participation) listings. Therefore no further reference is made to EP inputs and outputs.

A. AE External Factors

1. National EZ/EC Program Guidelines

The process used by Midwestern County community leaders in creating the 1998 application adhered to an empowered approach. Town hall meetings and survey questionnaires led to a list of prioritized needs and expectations as expressed by a wide demographic range of citizens. The MCEC's own strategic categories (QOL, ED, and FSS), and benchmarks within each theme, continue to reflect the strategic goals of the national program's authors as well. While the high level of citizen input was evident in 1998, its continued engagement, especially by low-income individuals, has waned over the course of the first five years of the program's operation. Other comprehensive community building

initiatives have struggled with the cost versus perceived benefit of continuous citizen engagement as well (Kubish et al, 2002). The primary factor for the drop-off of citizen input with the MCEC is cost. The county's original EZ/EC action plan was formulated on the expectation of receiving a \$25 million award and so, outlined a menu of 52 projects that cumulatively matched that funding level. In fact, a portion of that plan called for the MCEC to support a work team consisting of a representative group of citizens, including low-income families, whose members regularly would review the performance indicators of the active benchmarks and make recommendations regarding what next steps the program should concentrate on in the future. As the MCEC Board reallocated funding at the reduced award level (\$2.5 million) in early 2000, it opted to preserve nearly all (but one) of the benchmarks. That decision led to the situation where many benchmarks were not supported with seed money, and where sponsorship of any sort of on-going evaluation effort seemed unreasonable given stakeholders perception that the program operated under austere conditions at its start. See Benchmark Summary Sheets, Appendix B, Tables B1-B3, Columns E for original funding requests for each benchmark and Columns G for money allocated and spent.

The MCEC has applied the overarching strategies dictated by the national EZ/EC legislation to a high degree. Statistics and observations gathered as a result of this study, especially from the Benchmark Summary spreadsheets, illustrate the net increase in number of partners at the local, regional, state and federal levels (see Columns F and I in all Appendix B tables). The evaluation's

interviews, plus observations from the MCEC Board of Director meetings and minutes, show that program leaders often discuss sustainability issues and consider those concepts as key components in any decision to support a particular benchmark.

2. National Economy

Midwestern County has suffered with most of the country through the economic downturn over the last four years. Any attempt to isolate the effects of the MCEC program on the community's economic situation by citing statistics indicating positive change in the number of quality jobs and/or a substantially lower unemployment rate since 1998 is negated by the reality of that national recession. Despite recent reports that the nation is emerging from the economic slump, many of Michigan's rural counties continue to lag behind the rest of the state in realizing the benefits of that recovery. This especially is true in the area of unemployment as Midwestern County, and an adjacent county, have the second and third highest percentage of out-of-work residents, respectively, when compared with the rest of Michigan's 83 counties on a seasonally adjusted basis (Michigan Department of Treasury, 2004).

This reality has led to a downward spiral of funding and staffing reductions to federal and then correspondingly, to state program budgets, and finally to deep program funding reductions for many types of human service, and other, locally based programs. Conceptual and monetary support for the national EZ/EC initiative also has varied over the life of the MCEC designation in part due to new policy priorities reflected by changing federal/state administrative and

legislative leadership. The Midwestern County program continues to operate under that cloud of potential partial funding cuts or even, total program elimination. That threat has materialized in part as the program's sixth year of funding recently was reduced from \$250,000 to \$191,000 by the USDA.

The recent recession also influenced the MCEC program work plan as local and regional service providers continually seek to replace monies lost through state and federal cutbacks via requests to MCEC for direct funding, or by asking the program's staff members to identify alternative funding sources and for grant writing assistance. It also translates to the need for MCEC program staff to constantly spend resources (time and money) to recruit and orient new stakeholders to its key leadership positions due to the high rate of staff turnover within partnering organizations.

3. Mandates and Reporting Requirements

The final set of factors representing primary external influences of the MCEC program is the various mandates and/or legislation specifying quality, client eligibility, or other standards with which the program must comply. One group of those mandates is generated due to local participation in large, nationally based programs. The "No Child Left Behind" program that requires many school systems to adjust, and upgrade as necessary, student assessment and testing procedures is a good example. Those schools that fail to meet minimum student performance standards over a specific period of time face a series of increasingly severe repercussions, culminating with the prospect of an outside agency's administration takeover of the school in question.

Another type of mandate requires locally based programs to submit an assessment of service quality and/or proof of collaborative effort as a precursor to receiving funds from state governmental agencies or foundations. Homeless assistance programs, such as the MCEC's Benchmark 18.8, which are funded by United States Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and administered in Michigan's rural areas by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), offer a good example of this type of hurdle that local service providers face. In order to receive emergency shelter operating and administrative funds, Continuum of Care (CC) groups across the state must submit comprehensive community plans that demonstrate a coordinated effort in delivering homeless services. These plans must be approved by local authorities and are subject to audit, monitoring, and administrative requirements by HUD and MSHDA. Homeless shelters must meet all local zoning and building codes, plus must regularly submit performance and outcome updates to those funding organizations.

Many other examples of mandates, rules, and regulations were encountered during the first phase of MCEC operation. The development of a countywide recreation plan and citizen preference survey that helped the process of securing monies from Michigan's Department of Natural Resources; USDA-RD's requirement that an environmental impact study be completed on a newly purchased industrial park site before any MCEC money could be used to add sewer and water infrastructure, and; the rule that a housing needs and availability

assessment be completed as a preliminary step in the process of securing USDA's Mutual Self Help program funding—represent a few of those examples.

B. EP External Factors

The set of externalities affecting the work of the mid-term evaluation is similar to the those influencing the operation of the MCEC program. Specifically, the sluggish economy that most of the nation experienced over the last four years (since 2000) led to a series of funding and staffing cutbacks to my principal employer's workforce and menu of social programs as well. From my personal perspective, that scenario meant that continued support for my housing program leader position was not guaranteed. Constant staffing changes within the MCEC's partnering organizations affected my efforts to effectively identify, contact and interview key informants who had the necessary background and experience to offer informed opinions regarding EC program expectations from a national or state perspective. That situation added time and expense to the project as often my investigation looking for that expert opinion yielded little else than unreturned telephone calls and/or a referral to another individual.

Another external factor involves the continuing interest by foundations and other funding organizations to determine the effectiveness of comprehensive community building initiatives such as the MCEC in terms of return on investment, degree of impact, and sustainability. Previous discussion in this paper has described the greater evaluation effort targeting urban community development programs, with rural programs finishing a distant second in terms of number of studies performed at the local program level. I believe that

shortcoming directly assisted this study's initial funding request being approved. It was apparent that while many regional and state community development specialists, with whom I am in contact due to my housing program leader responsibilities, were well aware of the MCEC program, few knew of the complexity and comprehensiveness behind its approach and therefore, wanted to know more. This undercurrent of interest paved the way for the evaluation's funding award, my primary employer encouraging me to carryout the assignment by providing a half-time study leave for six months, and for the assistance provided to me and MCEC stakeholders in terms of advice and dialogue by a large cadre of rural community development experts from several government agencies and universities, plus many for-profit firms that evaluate and offer consultation services to these programs.

C. AE Assumptions

1. EZ/EC Legislation

The principles behind the enacting legislation of the national community building programs administered by USDA have been mentioned in prior sections of this paper.

2. MCEC and Community Change

At the Midwestern County level, assumptions of leaders and program staff who not only are active with the MCEC program, but also play many other community leadership roles, follow a similar tone as the national EZ/EC principles. Those mini-theories represent the group's collective knowledge and learning that is reflected by their action in addressing how to best accomplish

community change. They are influenced by feedback obtained regarding past success in attracting grants and other forms of assistance using a comprehensive and collaborative approach to delivering community services. Several examples of that approach's effectiveness are evident by noting the output of several benchmarks that show a high total number of partners (see Benchmark Summary Sheets, Appendix B, Tables B1-B3, Columns I), including:

- The development and distribution of a human resource directory by the countywide human service coordinating work team as part of Benchmark 16.2,
- The work of the economic development organization subcontracted by the MCEC and all other economic development agencies in the county that focuses on retaining and expanding job opportunities within a two-county region, plus performs a host of other tasks as part of Benchmarks 11.1 through 11.5,
- The effort of the housing service provider collaborative group—the Decent, Affordable, and Safe Housing (DASH) Team—that assisted in delivering most of the activities related to the nine housing-related benchmarks, including Benchmark 18.3 (provide low income family assistance to rehabilitate housing) and Benchmark 18.4 (Group Work Camp that used a crew of teenagers during Summer 2004 to help paint and perform various home maintenance projects to over 57 homes in the area), and,

- The effort that led to the development of a 13-county plan to extend Internet access to all residents and businesses as part of total partner leader (with 23) Benchmark 22's outcomes (eliminate informational access disparities).

Christenson (1989) offers three models of rural community development--*self-help*, *technical assistance*, and *conflict*--that vary according to differing assumptions, role of the change agent, basis of change, core problems to be addressed, and overarching goals of the change initiative. Two of those models, *self-help* (*SH*) and *technical assistance* (*TA*), are applicable when discussing Midwestern County community development assumption preferences.

Communities that assume that *SH* is a preferred strategy focus their community development efforts on institutionalizing a process of change that targets building infrastructure addressing a wide range of natural, built, political and human capital issues by expanding and enhancing the collaborative network of partners that operate under that infrastructure (Flora & Flora, 2004). Broad-based and sustained citizen participation in the change process is an integral part of *SH* model, as is the ability to respond to new threats and opportunities to economic or quality of life issues in a timely manner. The *TA* version adheres to a more scientific, rational approach that relies on expert advice regarding definable problems with technically and cost-appropriate solutions (Flora & Flora, 2004). Citizen input is lower in the *TA* model, and the emergence of a particular project's importance is based more on a narrow definition of community need than the *SH* model.

Given that brief overview, it would seem the two approaches represent incompatible strategies concerning how a community thinks development and change should be handled; however, they co-exist quite well in Midwestern County. *SH* is easily the goal to which MCEC leaders aspire as they carry out the program's business of implementing sustainable community change. Frequent conversations observed over the course of this evaluation, during MCEC Board of Director's meetings and other organization's meetings as well, give testament to the value that community's leaders place on this approach. One good example illustrating that success is represented by the process that led to the creation of the EC designation in the first place. Several other examples focus on benchmarks that are devoted entirely to building capacity with a wide base of leaders and private citizens, including: Benchmark 5.1 that helped create a countywide recreation plan and department via a resident preference survey and Benchmark 10.1 in which MCEC funding assisted with the start-up and operation of a countywide volunteer center that now coordinates several major projects.

But where the overarching philosophical assumption that *SH* community change is preferred and practiced whenever possible by most Midwestern County leaders, the actual means of performing the MCEC plan of work often is more a result of a *TA* approach. As discussed in the program's external factors section (AE), programs such as the MCEC and other community service providers, spend a tremendous amount of staff time and money in complying with the various rules and regulations stipulated by funders of their (the local provider's) programs. As such, a lot of the first phase effort of the MCEC was

spent in identifying and/or paying for feasibility studies, business plans, surveys and other assessment procedures that were the requirement of a potential or current funding agency. Illustrations of this type of MCEC activity include the farmers' market's (Benchmark 12.2) feasibility and market studies, plus the creation of a business plan and several unsuccessful proposals to sponsor a feasibility study for Benchmark 18.10 that calls for the development of a senior-assisted living center.

There is evidence of an undercurrent of disagreement in this group's meaning schemes concerning where best to focus MCEC initial effort in bringing sustainable change to the community. For example, as part of the priorities established in 1998, one called for the program to provide more activities for youth as a way to address the negative outcome that so many young adults leave the community following their high school graduation. One sub-group of MCEC stakeholders might assert that the most economical, long-term solution would start with building a youth activity center. Another part of the group might favor starting a family strengthening program that would be available to a number of existing schools, such as a youth mentoring program proposed by the Progress Team. That program would utilize parents, community leaders, and senior volunteers to act as mentors for all ages of children in conjunction with many types of activities (sports, reading, homework assistance, etc.). While this type of tension is evident in the planning process of many benchmarks, the key program members do not let those philosophical differences impede the progress of a particular benchmark's development at hand as observed during several

MCEC Board of Director and Executive Team meetings. In short, the differences in perception are known and tolerated by MCEC team members as I did not witness, nor hear any past account of, any situation where it erupted into open conflict.

3. Evaluation Theory

At the start of this mid-term evaluation's field work, it was evident that the community-based stakeholders viewed the evaluation as more of a summative approach designed only to judge the success of the program's first phase effort and then, publicize those results. And why not? Statistics taken from the USDA's BMS indicated that the MCEC program was performing at a high level. Also, only a single, one-day assessment had been performed on the program by USDA over its first five years so the Midwestern County leaders were anxious to tell their unique story to a larger audience. Stakeholders initially viewed this study and its findings as an opportunity to promote the program's good work and create a greater local, state, and federal awareness regarding its performance.

The group's buy-in to the responsive and participatory format appeared to be low in the initial phases of the study's field work, but generated a great deal of interest in latter stages of the project, especially as evidenced by the Progress Team meetings. I believe the reason for that early lukewarm reception is that it took time for the group to develop an understanding and to reach consensus regarding the long-term community benefits that the study offered. The majority opinion of the group seemed to view the evaluation process more as an audit meant to judge the performance of the program, than a democratic series of

exercises designed to improve the program's operation. As the study progressed and information was made available regarding the true intent of the project, stakeholders responded in a positive manner to any request I made for their time or opinions. Within that process, my attempts to verify observations with various members of the group that at first appeared to run against the grain of popular belief regarding program's success—such as the lack of continued citizen engagement in the program after the 1998 application or that a small business assistance focus was lacking in the MCEC first phase effort—were not treated as threats to the program's reputation, but instead, thoughtfully considered and discussed.

D. EP Assumptions

The interplay between the general social theories, local theories, stakeholder and my perceptions about program impact, and stakeholder beliefs concerning the value of evaluation activities has been discussed previously in the methods section of this dissertation. Figure 3, (see page 33), further illustrates that system of inquiry. All of those components serve as the basis for the menu of assumptions in the creation and implementation of the MCEC mid-term evaluation.

E. AE Inputs

Inputs are resources available to a program for use in planning, implementing and evaluating its degree of progress toward meeting stated outcomes and ultimate impact (Carroll & McKenna, 2001). In the case of the MCEC program, inputs represent the cumulative assets of the community and

are the foundation from which the program operates (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

1. Paid Staff

The MCEC director started in early 2000 and he, along with a consultant and administrative assistant, are the only paid staff of the MCEC program. Of that group, the director plays a critically influential role in the operation and performance of the MCEC as the sole full-time employee. That observation was confirmed during the stakeholder interviews performed for this evaluation as the overwhelming majority thought that the director and the program were inseparable—in other words, that the reputation of one could not be discussed apart from the other. The MCEC director brings a unique set of skills to the position that serve him well in building and enhancing the program's operation. That skill set includes: past experience as an educational administrator and community development specialist, personal values that favor a social justice perspective, and a willingness to operate in an environment that demands a flexible, inquisitive, and creative decision-making approach. He tirelessly promotes the tenets of the program during the many multi-level governmental functions he attends on a regular basis, and also, while serving as a member on numerous community service organizations' advisory boards.

While the traits listed above serve as the foundation for the manner in which the MCEC director carries out his duties on a day-to-day basis, his operating regime is best described by *social entrepreneurship*. Traditional definitions of entrepreneurship often focus on the traits and success of for-profit

or business owners, but the concept of acting entrepreneurial can be expanded to include a person, team, or organization trying to achieve a social or economic end by means of acting as an innovator, change agent, opportunist or by generally demonstrating resourcefulness on a long-term basis (Davis, 2002). As the primary force behind the operation of a complex community development program, the MCEC director's time is stretched thin between the tasks prescribed in building so many different programs. His primary strategy in making those tough choices regarding where to spend that limited amount of time centers on the benefit each choice represents in regard to long-term community change—another basic trait of any type of entrepreneur—either social or business. For instance, I observed that while large business retention and recruitment activities were being carried out by the MCEC subcontracted economic development corporation, small business assistance was lacking as a part of the program's action plan. That observation was confirmed through conversations with the program stakeholders via interviews and the Progress Team meetings. Eventually that group recommended the development of a small business initiative as a Phase II project of the MCEC.

That decision was the starting point-in-time at which the entrepreneurial activity began for the director as he purposefully began to survey various community and regional partners for their level of support for such a project, identified a potential grant through his network of regional, state, and federal contacts that would fund a portion of the project, discussed hiring the MCEC consultant to coordinate and write the proposal for that potential grant, and

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generally, rearranged and cleared his schedule to accommodate the short deadline for that proposal's submission. The resulting decision to develop a small business initiative signifies a major change in direction for the MCEC in how it plans to spend its time in expanding small business assistance, job training, and vocational education from within.

The consultant represents the second highest administrative expenditure category for the MCEC, after the director's salary. Her primary roles within the program include: an investigator of potential funding for existing and potential benchmark projects, a proposal writer, plus a resource regarding the history and development of the program to area organizations. She also updates the USDA's BMS and tracks MCEC Board of Director allocations and expenditures. This individual was instrumental in preparing the original application and continues to be an opinion leader in helping to determine its operating direction. Through her efforts, over \$2 million in new funding has been secured from various sources to benefit benchmark initiatives.

2. Volunteers

Most program advisory teams exert considerable influence over their organization's overall performance (Johnson, 1996; Fowler, 1995). MCEC program volunteers are another asset that provide benefit to the community in a holistic fashion. A core group of current Board of Director members was involved in the initial application process and continues to promote the value of collaboration and comprehensive delivery of community services on an active basis. Most members of that group who do not currently serve in a formal MCEC

administrative capacity are still involved with the program by leading or volunteering to assist with various benchmark activities. Through the efforts of that existing volunteer group and the MCEC director, new volunteers continually are identified and recruited to participate in program activities.

Observation of the MCEC group of volunteers reflects the diverse composition needed for team success cited as important in the literature review section of this paper. There appears to be an even representation between the professional staff members from various service providers—such as the education, human service, business, and government sectors—and individuals who are not officially linked to a specific organizations but still possess a wide range of previous work experience and interests. The group as a whole operates with a similar number of residents who have lived in the area for most of their lives balanced by those who have recently emigrated to Midwestern County in the last decade. Although this evaluation's methods did not include a formal investigation into the experience level, operating preference, and other personal characteristics of each MCEC program stakeholder, observations focusing on the MCEC Board of Directors meeting dynamics made over the six-month-period, along with face-to-face interviews and many other informal conversations, confirms the assertion that the key decision makers of this program represent the wide range, but balanced blend, of personal and experiential characteristics needed for effective team operation.

Several other factors regarding the behavior of the MCEC group of volunteers lead to the program's overall operational success. First, the degree of

trust that the group places in the MCEC director and his methods is extremely high. I did not witness any stakeholder criticism regarding the general operation of the program. MCEC stakeholders—due to the busy schedules, their volunteer status, and also the extreme complexity of the program—entrust the director to make expedient and responsible decisions regarding the activities of the program. Secondly, this group practices a high level of fiscal restraint. As evidence, in the first phase of the MCEC, no USDA money was spent on benchmarks that scored in the lowest quadrant as determined by the BRS (see Table 1-page 43). That statistic means that very little risk was assumed in developing individual projects that had little chance of progressing past an initial step. Standard operating procedure for the MCEC is that any benchmark must first have an active local or regional leader to take responsibility for its overall development before receiving any MCEC money. Finally, this group practices its responsibility of guiding the program with great integrity. They view themselves as stewards of a quarter million, USDA dollars per year. While they feel that amount of money can make a significant difference in a high poverty area such as their county, they also believe that the spending of those funds must be accomplished in a prudently responsible manner.

3. Other Assets

Partners of the MCEC, either as part of the original application or added as a result of the program's first five years of benchmark activities, are another set of resources utilized by the community as a whole. This evaluation found

several examples illustrating the MCEC's successful effort to develop benchmarks by building bonding and bridging social capital, including:

- The farmers' market (Benchmark 12.2) eventually secured USDA-RD and foundation funds to build and operate the center utilizing several new partnerships including the local Amish community, university Extension located in Midwestern County and at that institution's main campus, Michigan Department of Agriculture, a statewide rural council, and a local city. The project is successful to date partially because of MCEC's effort at the local level to bring small business and small farm owners, and the Amish community together to discuss common areas of interests and differences—an example of building *bonding* social capital. At the same time, the project illustrates enhanced *bridging* relationships as the increased cooperation among potential farm market stakeholders at the local level served as a catalyst for favorable consideration in funding the project on the part of regional foundations and the USDA.

- The county's housing problems especially were assisted by increased levels of collaboration when viewed through the social capital bonding and bridging lens. Through the facilitation of the MCEC, the DASH Team formed and for the first time most of the county's agencies responsible for providing low-income families with housing counseling, homebuyer mortgage rate or down payment assistance, and low interest loans for home rehabilitation met and worked together on several projects—an example of increased bonding social capital. While past DASH Team projects focused on local issues, such as the creation of a common application form (Benchmark 17.1) and of a housing

service provider directory; it is proposed that this group will increase its level of collaboration by assuming a greater leadership role in the development and administration of the USDA-sponsored Mutual Self-Help Housing program (Benchmark 18.9) and by applying to become a non-profit, countywide housing development organization (Benchmark 18.2). Both of those projects would require further building of bridging-type relationships with partners outside the county.

- The highest scoring benchmark (14.1) per the BRS that led to the creation and continued operation of a countywide domestic abuse center, is a model of building bonding and bridging social capital simultaneously. Several partners, including the Midwestern County United Way, several churches, and a local women's auxiliary, assisted in developing a feasibility study, locating a facility, plus renovating and operating it since 2000. The local branch of a statewide bank provided a special term and rate mortgage to finance the shelter. This benchmark is the only MCEC project that lists private citizen donations as a funding source and it was effective in receiving funding from state and federal sources such as MSHDA and a domestic violence treatment organization. As part of the last update available, the shelter had housed 53 people, counseled four individuals due to sexual assault, another 137 clients had received legal advice, and 278 youth had received violence prevention education--all services that would have been provided out-of-county, or at a reduced level, previous to the MCEC designation.

- Part of USDA's promise to assist EC designated communities was not only to furnish funding, but the organization also committed considerable staff time to provide technical assistance to these programs. This input assisted the MCEC program in several ways. It has been noted that changes at the federal level leave the local program in a perpetual state of adjustment as new staff members take time to become orientated to the history and current operation of the MCEC. While technical assistance at the state level also has been affected by staff reassignments, the situation is not as volatile as at the federal level. The work of the Michigan USDA-RD staff members, who have regional responsibilities that include Midwestern County, has been exemplary. These individuals have worked with the program since its inception and in each case have assumed substantial leadership roles with benchmarks that, in turn, have performed well.

Substandard and unsafe housing were two areas identified by the community as issues the MCEC should address in 1998. Through a unique relationship which has not been duplicated in any other Michigan county, the USDA-RD housing specialist commits up to two days of her time per week to travel to Midwestern County and to work closely with the MCEC housing advocate retained through Benchmark 18.7. These two individuals collaborate as needed while making home inspections for rehabilitation loan requests, referring clients, assisting potential homeowners address their financial record problems, and qualifying families for USDA-RD down payment and/or interest rate assistance. They each played an important role in the early development of

DASH Team as well. Their efforts, combined with other housing assistance providers who are part of the DASH Team, led to Midwestern County residents receiving over \$1,200,000 in very-low and low-income mortgages, repair loans and grants. That total represents nearly one-half of the money that citizens in the other 12 surrounding counties received combined in 2003 (Midwestern County Enterprise Community, 2004).

The USDA-RD community development specialist is also a valued member of the MCEC program's operation in Phase I. This individual acted in a number of advisory roles serving as a liaison between the local program and Michigan, or federal, USDA-RD administrative staff, but her outstanding effort is most pronounced in the development of Benchmark 18.4, Group Work Camp. This "camp" was actually a week long series of projects whereby teenagers from all over the country traveled to Midwestern County and performed minor home repair and painting jobs for low-income homeowners who requested their services. A national organization assisted with funding, worker recruitment, and travel logistics, but the level of local planning and quantity of volunteers needed to successfully hold this camp was incredible. The USDA-RD community development specialist was the catalyst for building this cooperative network of partners and volunteers as she first traveled to out-of-state training sessions to investigate the feasibility of bringing such a program to Midwestern County, and then returned to the community to facilitate the process as needed.

4. Community Values

Community values, like assumptions, act as cornerstone sources of influence over the decision-making process of the MCEC. Centering on the values that might impact the work toward community change, it is evident that the community's members value their close proximity to two *micropolitan* areas. The USDA defines a *micropolitan* area as a primarily rural county with an urban cluster of at least 10,000 persons, and where at least 25 percent of the residents from outlying non-metro counties commute to that centrally located county for employment (USDA-Economic Research Service, 2004). While Midwestern County is not officially designated a part of those two *micropolitan* areas, its close proximity to these small urban areas provides residents with an increased number of choices in entertainment, health care, human service, education, media, retail and government services. Concurrently, Midwestern County residents feel that they benefit from a traditional rural environment that values a "know your neighbor" attitude and the belief that a moderate amount of economic growth is acceptable, but not at the expense of existing residents quality of life expectations. The best example of the latter belief emerges from the survey data gathered from Midwestern County residents as part of the early development of a recreation plan and commission (Benchmark 5.1). The executive summary, titled *Who the Midwestern County Parks and Recreation Commission (MCPRC) should serve* (p.3-Focus Group Summary) states, "Regardless of the services provided, MCPRC services should be focused on Midwestern County residents first, then tourists" (Midwestern County Parks and Recreation Department, 2003).

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That set of conflicting attitudes is well recognized in the community and the effects of the "maintain the rural atmosphere" versus "economic growth means a better life for everyone" opinions are reflected in many MCEC activities. For instance, two of the primary strengths listed by the Progress Team during its SWOT analysis of the county were: 1) its central location in the state providing excellent highways and access to proximate mid-size metropolitan areas, and 2) its abundant natural resources leading to the frequent use of the tourism marketing slogan, "20 Lakes in 20 Minutes." Those items also were mentioned in similar lists during the community prioritizing of issues in 1998. However, two of the prominent weaknesses listed during those same sets of exercises in 1998, and again in 2004, were lack of good paying jobs, lack of major industry, and lack of retail choices. Any concentrated effort by the MCEC to address those perceived weaknesses that are all economic development related is destined to eventually "bump up" against those who value the small town, rural environment of Midwestern County.

F. AE Outputs

Returning to the logic model outlining the various interrelating components of the MCEC program, outputs represent the activities to date that the program has been instrumental in orchestrating. They also focus on the intended beneficiaries of those activities.

1. Activities

Most of the program's activities are listed as part of the BRS tool developed for this evaluation. As reported previously, that list was created

through the combined efforts of the MCEC program staff, principally the director and myself. As such, it represents a comprehensive list of milestones that contribute to the development, support, operation and evaluation of a particular benchmark. Those activities are categorized into the following themes:

- *Leadership*—e.q., benchmark leader named and/or active; committee or team formed, and/or currently meets; brainstorming or organizational meeting held, and; investigated sources for potential partners,
- *Stakeholder involvement*—number of discussions at MCEC Board of Director meetings; number of MCEC staff and volunteers on benchmark-related advisory boards, and; amount of MCEC money allocated and spent,
- *Plan development*—strategic plan developed, implemented, and evaluated on a short-, intermediate-, and long-term basis, and; sponsored feasibility or business plan,
- *Fundability*—number of proposals written and grants received, and; amount of in-kind assistance received,
- *Degree of collaboration*—number of local, regional, state and federal partners,
- *Other activities*—support letters written; EC designation used to increase individual benchmark grant proposal scores; efforts to promote the program; sponsorship and participation with the mid-term evaluation; the Progress Team's work, and; any subcontracted service.

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2. Beneficiaries

The program's vision statement is the starting point for listing the recipients of the set of activities identified above. Due to the comprehensive, holistic approach to community change that the MCEC follows, that group basically includes anyone residing in, or visiting, the community. From a different perspective and given that the community's persistent poverty levels were one of the primary reasons that it was awarded the EC designation, the intended beneficiaries of many benchmark activities are low-income families and individuals. Many Phase I projects reflect that emphasis including the majority of the benchmarks listed as part of the FSS category. Some of the highest scoring projects of that group are found in the housing-related initiatives according to BRS averages. They include Benchmark 18.3, which provides low-rate loans to low-income residents who need to rehabilitate their homes, Benchmark 18.4, the Group Work Camp project, Benchmark 18.7 that funds the housing advocacy counselor who works exclusively with the low-income residents, and Benchmark 18.8 that led to the coordination of homeless services in the county.

Aside from the populations that are directly targeted by MCEC activities, several other groups benefit from participation in the program. The increase in the number of partners providing funding, technical assistance and volunteering time at all levels of geographic location has already been noted. Several examples exist in which organizations that were providing services in adjacent counties prior to the MCEC designation either became aware of the program's breadth of initiatives and approached the group with a proposal to extend those

services to Midwestern County, or was solicited by the MCEC program staff first, and eventually became an active partner. They include:

- Benchmark 11.5 that led to the MCEC subcontracting a neighboring county's economic development corporation to promote Midwestern County industrial development prospects to regional, state, national and even international markets,
- Benchmark 20.3 in which a home-visiting medical services organization that covers a nine-county region (including Midwestern County) identified the MCEC priority to address home health care issues and matched it to a grant proposal from the USDA-Rural Utilities Service to enhance client access and reduce costs through the use of patient home monitors,
- Benchmark 18.3 that brought Federal Home Loan Bank-Indianapolis home rehabilitation funding to Midwestern County, along with several other counties, for the first time.

G. AE Outcomes

Program outcomes are indicators of changes that the program has realized, directly or indirectly, as a result of its operation that are measured at short-, intermediate-, and long-term intervals of time. This evaluation has divided the MCEC term of designation into two distinct phases of operation, each representing five years of the program's operation. The following outcome discussion will follow that same dichotomy. Correspondingly, short-term outcomes fall within the first phase (1-5 years of operation), while the Progress Team's action plan and other developments that spun out of this evaluation are

the subject of intermediate-term outcomes (within 6-to-10 years of designation).

The long-term outcomes represent the ultimate impact of the program and so have a sustainability component that represents the ability of the program to maintain its various initiatives beyond the EC designation scheduled to end in 2009.

1. Short term

To date, the MCEC program's list of inter-related outcomes reflecting community change includes:

- ➔ *Create awareness of complementary programs and increase levels of collaboration among the county's service providers.*

Several benchmark milestones illustrate this on-going effort to develop a comprehensive network of community-based service delivery by MCEC stakeholders. Given the current environment of budget reductions to most public sector programs that leads to ever-increasing shortages of available resources (money and staff), long-term collaboration addressing gaps and overlap of services is no longer an option for agencies involved in this important work; it is simply a necessity. One of the best examples illustrating the multi-system effects of a MCEC benchmark's development in relation to other organizations is Benchmark 5.1 that led to the creation of a countywide recreation department and commission. Starting with the priority listed as a result of the 1998 community assessment process to improve recreational opportunities for all residents, the benchmark scored well on the BRS due to its subsequent activities including a community survey, the creation of strategic and implementation

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plans, and the identification of long-term funding sources. Sustainability issues also will be addressed as the commission intends to explore resident level of support for approving a millage proposal to pay for its continued operation. During the initial phase of this evaluation, the development of this initiative seemed to center on the goal of increasing recreational opportunities by improving, expanding or establishing the county's public parks. Subsequent observations identified a more holistic approach to the department's work plan, however, as key MCEC stakeholders who also served on the Parks and Recreation Commission explored opportunities for the new department to collaborate with educators. Most of this investigation centered on enhancing after-school programs as part of the US Department of Education's 21st Century Learning Grants operating in two of the public school systems in the county. Other discussions sought to expand options regarding the department's sponsorship of youth recreational programs at various public facilities in the county and of the more traditional youth athletic leagues, such as baseball, football, and basketball.

It is impossible to prove that this collaborative effort ever would have occurred in absence of the MCEC, but the program's facilitation of activities was the primary catalyst that led to the creation of the recreation department and commission. Many new partnerships were created due to this effort, including: Midwestern County university Extension offices recommending and cooperating with several of that university's campus-based researchers as they designed, administered, analyzed and created the final report that informed the new

department's strategic plan; county government officials supporting that plan's creation, deciding to house it within its organizational framework, and funding a portion of its director's salary; several new funding resources becoming active with the county as evidenced by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources accepting the plan as a first step for the county to be considered for funding to fix-up and operate its many parks.

- *Enhance bonding and bridging social capital networks by increasing the number of partners that operate in the county.*

This component's contribution to the program's work plan previously has been discussed in the AE input section of this paper.

- *Increase resident access to community-based services.*

Several benchmark activities specifically focused on this type of outcome. Most of the Phase I effort behind Benchmark 16.2's development concentrated on creating and distributing a directory of human service providers. A work team comprised of members from a human service coordinating body took leadership with this project and the directory eventually was mailed to all provider organizations in the county. Future plans call for regularly scheduled updates of the directory, its posting on the Internet, and mailing it to all county residents. Similar projects were the focus of Benchmarks 18.5 and 18.7 that led to a housing assistance directory and a list of available homes for rent, respectively.

- *Facilitate the institutionalization of infrastructure capacity building and/or other formalized procedures in a comprehensive manner to address economic development, quality of life and family self-sufficiency issues.*

Clearly, the bulk of the MCEC's Phase I effort is reflected by this set of outcomes. The theory of change supporting this action is that the optimum, most sustainable method of achieving desired community change is through the creation and continued support of formal organizations operating at the local level under the guidance of strategic plans that are informed by a representative number of community members. In many cases, the MCEC encountered benchmarks indicating community priorities in 1998 that could not be acted upon until some form of basic capacity was first developed as a platform from which to address those issues. An analysis of the top two quadrants of benchmark average scores (see Table 2-MCEC Program Benchmarks Institutionalizing Infrastructure, page 80) shows that of those 20 qualifiers, all but five (Benchmarks 4.1-Character Counts! training, 18.3-mortgage and rehabilitation loans, 18.4-Group Work Camp, 18.7-housing advocate position, and 24-leadership training) devoted a major percentage of effort to creating the capacity with which to respond to either the 1998 community priorities or to new opportunities that emerged since that time.

Table 2. MCEC Program Benchmarks Institutionalizing Infrastructure

May 21, 2004

Strategic Category	Quad-rant	Bench-mark #	Project Description(s)	Percent of benchmark effort institutionalizing infrastructure
Quality of Life	4	2.1	Blight ordinances created, solid waste coordinator hired, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority created, electronic product recycling,	60
	4	5.1	Countywide recreation plan created	100
	4	6.1	Art council formed and continues to meet	100
	3	1.1	Comprehensive master plan created, Citizen Planner training offered	90
	3	4.1	Character Counts! training	0
	3	10.1	Establish and operate a volunteer center	100
	3	23	A local township grant obtained for evacuation center, another township sewer/water grant	40
Econ. Devel.	4	11.5	County Renaissance Zone, Brownfield redev., DDA development in a small city, much more	90
	4	12.2	Creation of farm market, including business plan creation and first year's operation	100
	4	24	Regional project led to development of Internet connectivity master plan	100
	3	11.1	Development of Small City B industrial park	100
	3	11.3	Development of Small City C industrial park, named as Renaissance Zone, receives grant for sewer and water	100
	3	13.2	Created and operated donated automobile repair/training facility (currently out-of-operation)	50
	3	22	Leadership Institute in Small City	0
Family Self-Suffic.	4	14.1	County domestic violence shelter started and currently in operation	50
	4	18.3	Home mortgage and rehab. loans	
	4	18.4	Group work camp organized	20
	3	16.2	Resource directory of human service providers created and distributed to selected organizations	20
	3	18.7	Housing advocate leads to greater USDA-RD mortgage loan activity	
	3	18.8	Continuum of Care committee created and continues to meet and discuss homeless issues	100

This important outcome can be defined by the MCEC's ability to utilize organizational learning concepts. Previous sections of this paper described the behavior of the MCEC Board of Directors and the director in relation to the community. That explanation alluded to the fact that this is an active, engaged, but small-in-numbers group who not unexpectedly demand an efficient use of their time when acting as MCEC stakeholders. This situation gives Board of Directors meetings and other events a business-like atmosphere at which agendas are created and promised end-of-meeting times are met. The resulting effect of that time constraint is that the program's decision maker's input is highly valued, and the process of considering options to existing benchmarks or entertaining new initiatives is formalized. The end result is the program moves ahead with its planning, implementation, and evaluation functions in a more seamless manner with information input, throughput (e.g., negotiations, alternative solutions), and output (decisions or need for more information) cycled in an efficient manner, but that follows a philosophy that values reflection and application of past experience and learning of the general group in making those decisions (Bulbolz & Sontag, 1993).

Entrepreneurship, if defined by the ability to effectively identify and respond to opportunities as they arise, is a valuable trait of a learning organization as well (Flora, Sharp, Flora, & Newton, 1997). Examples of the MCEC's ability to act in an entrepreneurial fashion go beyond the examples cited previously that detailed the director's behavior. It also includes all of the benchmarks created after the submission of the 1998 application—

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Benchmarks 22 (eliminate informational barriers); 23 (address community safety), and; 24 (enhance community leadership)—and the several cases in which individual project proposals received additional points due to the fact that an MCEC program was a supporting partner. Those projects include the two 21st Century Learning Grants (Benchmark 5.1) and most USDA-funded projects (Benchmarks 11.1-11.3, 13.2, 18.3, 18.4, 18.7, and 23). The several cases in which the MCEC subcontracted existing organizations to extend services that matched the Midwestern County program initiatives are also examples of the MCEC responding to opportunities. Hiring the existing economic development organization already doing business in an adjacent county to promote Midwestern County economic development resources, expanding the *Character Counts!* curriculum that teaches character education to area children and employees via the local university Extension office with assistance from economic development corporation (Benchmark 4.1), and negotiating partial salary support of the housing advocate position by that same university Extension department (Benchmark 18.7) are all examples of expanding the scope of the MCEC program by entrepreneurially taking advantage of opportunities presented by existing resources .

a. Poor Performing Benchmarks

It is the responsibility of this mid-term evaluation to investigate and report on all aspects of the MCEC program and so, a discussion concerning the low scoring benchmarks, or in other words, those with few short-term activities and outcomes, is in order. Previous discussion in this report stated that the MCEC

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Board of Directors made the decision to retain all but one of the 52 benchmarks listed in the 1998 application, even though the awarded funding level was drastically less. This decision profoundly affected the program's Phase I operation as it realistically could not implement an action plan designed to utilize ten times the funding as it actually received. Paid and volunteer staff members did not have the time or resources to take action on the complete set of benchmarks, so a selection criteria was established that emphasized first, the identification of local leadership and second, the identification of external funding sources, before moving forward to develop a specific project. The reality of the situation is that some of the benchmarks that did not meet those standards, and so, show little activity to date.

Considering the benchmarks that fell in the bottom two quadrants of the BRS average scores (see Table 1, pages 43-45), one of the primary reasons for that group's lack of performance is that the MCEC program had little political, social or economic ability to influence their development. Benchmark 7.2 represents a good example of that situation. It called for the construction of a tunnel under the interstate highway bridge to the north of a small city in Midwestern County so that members of the sizable Amish community could travel into the city more safely in their horse-drawn vehicles. This benchmark addressed a community-stated priority in 1998, but the MCEC program leaders found that they had little means to exert pressure on the Michigan Department of Transportation to change its long-term road and infrastructure strategic plans to include their (the MCEC) benchmark's objective.

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Another set of benchmarks performed poorly due to their high degree of alignment with a specific organization. Typically those organizations were named as potential leaders of the benchmark in 1998, but for many reasons—e.g., staff turnover, economic downturn and funding reductions—are no longer partnering at that anticipated level with the MCEC. Several of the health care related benchmarks fall into this category. For instance, Benchmark 20.2 was created to develop and construct a Midwestern County medical center that would be managed by a rural health care provider located in an adjacent county. Since 1998, however, that organization changed its geographic focus relating to services, so the current prospects of the MCEC partnering with it are slim. A number of benchmarks that were created to address individual job-training barriers (Benchmark 13.6), eliminate low-income family transportation obstacles (Benchmark 13.2), develop good work habits (Benchmark 15.1), and build family strengths through peer-managed family-enrichment teams (Benchmark 16.1) fall into the category of poor performance due to a relationship change between the MCEC relationship and an external partner from 1998 to 2000.

b. Administrative Cost Analysis

Another set of issues emerged over the course of this evaluation that ties into the short-term outcome discussion—namely costs incurred to administer the program. Benchmark 21 shows that these administrative costs currently average approximately 50 percent of total dollars spent by the program. Most of this money paid for the MCEC director's salary, fringe benefits and travel expenses, with another ten percent paid to the consultant. At first glance, this administrative

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costs-to-total funding statistic seems extremely high given the 10-30 percent range target that many grantors allow. However, other community-building programs have experienced a similar high administrative cost ratio especially in their first years of operation when labor-intensive tasks focusing on partnership expansion and capacity building dominate the program activities (Kubish et al., 2002). In defense of the MCEC program, the fiscal restraint that the stakeholders employ in deciding how and when to spend USDA money is very high, as evidenced by the fact that no funding was risked on benchmarks that scored poorly on the BRS. That value translates to a behavior that does not spend money without just cause, as evidenced by the amount of money that has been tentatively allocated to an assortment of benchmarks, but has yet to be spent (see Appendix B, Tables B1-B3, Columns G). Additionally, if the statistic for comparison is changed from USDA funding spent to total leveraged funding received by the community due to the program's efforts, then the resulting ratio is more respectable (50:1 or 2 percent administrative costs-to-total leveraged funding received).

2. Medium Term

Many of the expected medium-term outcomes of the MCEC have been outlined previously in this paper. They include:

- Increase the cadre of community leaders so that the core MCEC stakeholder group is not relied upon exclusively to plan and carry-out the bulk of community change initiatives,

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- Continue to create infrastructure and build the community's institutional capacity to respond to socioeconomic threats and opportunities,
- Begin to plan for the end of the EC program designation by insuring that all individual programs have developed strategic plans with measurable indicators for periodic evaluation.

An additional outcome of this nature involves the continuity of the program's leadership. A previous section of this report described the present director's high level of influence over all aspects of the MCEC, and one cannot imagine how the program would operate in his absence. At present, there is no plan in place to guide the program's decision makers in identifying, recruiting and selecting his replacement if he decides to change his current level of involvement with the program. Part of that plan also should be devoted to setting performance standards for that position; a necessary first step in creating a yearly evaluation of the director by the Board of Directors.

The Progress Team's work contributes to the discussion of intermediate-term outcomes for the program as well. Charged with the task of reviewing past development patterns of the program to provide a more informed perspective as to how to proceed in the future, the team produced a set of recommendations regarding Phase II operation guidelines to be considered for future allocations by the MCEC Board of Directors. As stated previously, the Progress Team's members represented a mixture of current and past MCEC Board members who varied on their level of involvement with the 1998 application process. Members also were selected according to their varied professional and/or private interests

in education, business, government, human service, religious, health and economic topics. This selection process gave equal voice to the historical development, current operation and professional expertise components of the program.

The general opinion reflected by the group's deliberations in creating the Phase II action plan was that the MCEC program has accomplished a lot in a short period of time. Group members agreed that one of its best outcomes for the community is the program's ability to facilitate collaboration through the effective use of seed capital, thereby bringing new partners and funding into Midwestern County. Part of the second day agenda included a presentation in which the director discussed past practices and emerging issues of the program. The team agreed, for the most part, with the director's assessment regarding the core group of benchmarks that the MCEC should continue to sponsor. ED initiatives received the strongest vote for continued support as Benchmarks 11.1 through 11.3 (expand and develop industrial parks for several Midwestern County cities); Benchmark 11.5 (subcontract the economic development corporation to continue marketing Midwestern County economic assets), and Benchmark 12.2 (operate the farm market) were approved for additional funds. Several QOL benchmarks also received a vote for continued support including: the Parks and Recreation Department (Benchmark 5.1), the Character Counts! program (Benchmark 4.1), and the housing advocacy position (Benchmark 18.7).

The Progress Team indicated that the MCEC plan of action should increase the program's effort to develop a few projects that previously had been

a stated community priority issues in 1998, but for one reason or another, had not demonstrated much success in the Phase I operation. Those projects include:

- Develop an assisted living care for seniors and the disabled,
- Build a rural health care center in northern Midwestern County that will enhance emergency and urgent care services,
- Start a family enrichment program that uses volunteer role models who will assist young parents, stressed families, and youth,
- Create a small business initiative that will assist all types of entrepreneurs (e.g., business, social, start-ups, expanding, seniors, women and low-income individuals).

It should be reiterated that each of these newly targeted priorities fit under the umbrella of existing benchmarks. As with all other individual projects previously developed, considerable discussion transpired during the Progress Team meetings to identify local leaders who might be willing to assume the long-term leadership roles of these individual projects. While each issue area owns a unique development history as part of the program's Phase I operation, the team's reasoning in choosing these four initiatives was based on a combination of responding to threats and to opportunities. In the former case (threats), creating and operating a youth mentoring program was based in part on the observation by a few of the Progress Team members that the public schools recently lost literacy program funding. An example of responding to an opportunity was represented by the small business initiative. It rose to the top of

the Progress Team's priority list for two reasons: 1) a large foundation announced that it was seeking proposals to develop regional, comprehensive entrepreneurial assistance networks, and 2) several influential partners of the MCEC agreed prior to the Progress Team meetings that the development of such a program was strategically imperative for Midwestern County to "grow from within" economically.

The complete list of Progress Team recommendations is listed as part of Appendix D-Table D7.

3. Long-term

Long-term outcomes represent the ultimate intended, and unintended, results of a program (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2001). They address how the community residents' lives have changed over time in response to the program's activities and/or to other factors within and outside the community as well. In the case of the MCEC, one of the best sources summarizing the program's intended efforts toward community comprehensive change is found in its vision statement that reads: *Through an empowered grass roots effort and regional cooperation, Midwestern County citizens will improve the quality of life for all, conserve natural resources, and promote further development of vibrant communities that are economically diverse and self-reliant.*

Additionally, the long-term impact and continued value of the MCEC operation with the Midwestern County community will be the continued practice of the collaborative methods it has employed effectively during its first phase of operation.

H. EP Outcomes

1. Short-term

The evaluation process for the MCEC program focused on providing stakeholders with valid information they could use to effectively inform the creation of a Phase II action plan, and then assist a team comprised of key leaders to create that future plan via a specific process previously described by the Progress Team activities (see pages 42 and 46-47). The rationale for creating the BRS and other tools (such as, benchmark and category comparisons) has been outlined previously. Evaluation surveys were mailed to all Progress Team members a week after the final meeting concluded asking their opinions regarding the utility of those tools, plus their views as to the effectiveness of the process and procedures employed during those two meetings. Nearly three-fourths of the group completed and returned the surveys. An analysis of those surveys found that an overwhelming majority of the members highly valued the BRS and other summaries regarding Phase I benchmark performance. Most of the exercises, for instance, the SWOT, trend analyses, and the issue prioritization process were well received, as were the presentations that outlined the mid-term evaluation methods along with the MCEC assets and emerging issues presentation.

In response to the question, "*What would you change?*," a few team members suggested that the proceedings be reduced to one day, that the benchmark history and comparisons be mailed out prior to the meetings to give team members more time to review them, and that overall, the team did not

represent the diversity of Midwestern County's residents—particularly from the low-income population. (For a complete summary of the Progress Team's evaluation results, please see Appendix E).

A significant number of respondents (64 percent) chose the most favorable response (on a 5-item scale in which choices ranged from 1- "not at all" to 5- "completely agree") to the question asking them to indicate their level of interest in serving on another Progress Team that would provide evaluation effort for the MCEC on an on-going basis. The magnitude of that favorable response is the best indication that this group of stakeholders desires a means by which to continue the work started by this mid-term evaluation. The post-meeting evaluation survey's support for the continuing Progress Team was not surprising since it reflected comments made by several team members to the evaluator, and to program staff members, that stated that the exercises re-energized their commitment to the MCEC goals and mission.

2. Medium Term

Intermediate changes anticipated by this evaluation study are listed under Column C2, as part of the EP Logic Model (Figure 1, page 25). That group of outcomes includes: the distribution of the this evaluation's community report to all levels of government (local, regional, state and federal) with the hope that its findings contribute to more favorable policy, funding, and technical assistance support to community development and human service programs in rural areas in general, and of course, to the Midwestern County region in particular. At the MCEC program level, intermediate changes that extend the work started by this

mid-term evaluation include: 1) creating the on-going Progress Team mentioned previously , and 2) using that team to create action plans for the high priority benchmarks named by the original Progress Team, especially the small business initiative, the family enrichment program, and the senior/seasonal citizen surveys. Support for those new projects officially has been guaranteed as the MEC Board of Directors recently approved the set of recommendations created by the original Progress Team.

The creation and on-going support of the Progress Team that will mainstream evaluation into more individual benchmark planning and implementation phases will also provide additional opportunities for higher levels of citizen engagement. As logic models more succinctly illustrate individual benchmark action plans, more community members will become aware and understand the program's numerous areas of potential impact. And as the program's activities and direction become better publicized, the on-going Progress Team should be able to access a new cadre of interested individuals to serve as members, especially from various populations that tend to be underrepresented in MCEC program planning to date. This effort should particularly target low-income family members. This citizen empowerment model is not new as its framework was part of the 1998 application to the USDA for EZ/EC designation, but the activity was dropped due to several extenuating circumstances previously outlined.

3. Long-term

All of the long-term outcomes listed in the EP Logic Model (Figure 1, page 25, Column C3) are tightly intertwined. The proposed cycle is quite clear—if MCEC stakeholders are successful in incorporating a culture of evaluation with all other program planning and implementing activities, then its target population (Midwestern County residents) will enjoy the sustained benefits of a better quality of life, appropriate economic development, and family self-sufficiency assistance. That impact will be realized due in part to the county's ability to attract higher levels of funding and other forms of support from new and existing partners at the local, regional, state and federal organizational levels. Those partners will be willing to participate in such programs because of the combined efforts of the community's leaders and private citizens as they practice collaboration while focusing on building comprehensive community development programs as established through the work of the MCEC program and told through its on-going evaluation effort.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

A. Recommendations

As part of the evolving process followed in the creation and implementation of this mid-term evaluation, the set of recommendations aimed at MCEC program improvement were not left to the purpose of the final community report, but instead, were part of the triangulating cycle that integrated their discussion with other study activities. As I made observations regarding the program's operation and took deliberate steps to credibly interpret them, opportunities of which I was aware, due to my housing program leadership position or other areas of experience, were incorporated into stakeholder interviews, and other program leader interactions. This practice falls within the role definition of an action researcher as a coach and co-learner with community program leaders, and also fits the rationale for utilizing evaluation methods that are responsive, participatory, and meant to improve program performance (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Stake, 1980, 1986). For example, several MCEC housing-related benchmarks focus on building more affordable homes for low-income family ownership. My knowledge of the housing assistance grant network led to a suggestion that a national USDA program should be investigated as its goals and target population align well with the MCEC's. As a result of that request, a meeting eventually was held in the county whereby the regional technical assistance provider subcontracted by USDA to administer the program met with several MCEC leaders, determined that the county was eligible to apply

for funding, and created an informal plan to develop an application within a year's time.

Other recommendations progressed in a similar manner. For instance, there is a critical need to identify and build the community leadership core of individuals. This activity will lessen the program's degree of reliance on the relatively small group of individuals who volunteer their time to plan and lead most MCEC activities. Benchmark 24 was created to address that issue and the first leadership class graduated while this study was underway. Long-term plans for that benchmark include expanding the training to the entire county. However, I noted several comments from stakeholders over the course of this study's field work that confirmed the need to more aggressively expand that leadership base. The majority of the active leaders have been guiding the MCEC since its inception and while no one specifically claimed to be "burned-out" from that responsibility, most agreed that they would welcome new members to their group.

A strategy tentatively planned by the MCEC to address that issue utilizes two surveys; one of the county's rapidly expanding senior and the other of the large seasonal citizen population. It is suspected that there would be a large number of respondents who represent both demographic groups (i.e., seniors who are part-time residents), but the two studies would serve different end purposes. The senior survey's questionnaire would focus on identifying the individual assets of full and part-time residents regarding past experience, and how they might be able to utilize those skills to address community needs. Part of

the work plan for the study would be to purposefully invite and offer training to those seniors who indicate that they would be willing to volunteer their time to community service in conjunction with the current assets they possess. This set of outputs would fit with Benchmark 24's overarching goals and objectives.

Previous studies suggest that seasonal citizens, in general, have different expectations regarding the growth of their part-time community than full-time residents, and so, that proposed survey would target the identification of this group's differing opinions regarding community change (USDA Forest Service, 2002; Green, Marcouiller, Deller, Erkkila, & Sumathi, 1996). With nearly one-half of all Midwestern County homes occupied on a seasonal basis, combined with the probability that this group possesses different socioeconomic characteristics than their full-time counterparts (i.e., wealthier and older), this study would assist the work of community development leaders by creating a profile of opinions for a large percentage of the county's population that is not politically represented and also, would serve as a foundation by which to identify, recruit, and enlist members of this group for community service, albeit part-time. Both of these proposed plans emerged directly out of the work of the mid-term evaluation. Of the two, the senior survey project received the greatest level of buy-in from the Progress Team and it became part of the set of recommendations detailing the Phase II MCEC activities created for Board of Directors consideration.

Other recommendations, previously mentioned in this report, were generated by the mid-term evaluation process as well and became part of the official record representing the Progress Team's work. They include: create a

succession plan and set of performance objectives for the program director's position, and build an evaluative culture within the program by sponsoring and promoting the on-going efforts of a Progress Team.

B. Beyond Constructivism: Transformational Learning Theory

As previously discussed in the conceptual framework section of this paper, CT was used as the orienting perspective. The planning, acting, observing, reflecting, discussing, theorizing and concluding phases represented an iterative methodology that had no precise starting or stopping point (Wadsworth, 2001). This perspective represented an inductive approach to research that seeks to identify grounded assumptions, principles and constructs as guides by which to analyze and interpret observations as data (Bowling, 2002; Adams & Steinmetz, 1993).

However, as I came to an understanding of the program's first phase of operation, I concluded that CT tended to direct my focus towards the individual level of meaning construction. This focus seemingly excluded an evaluation of group process (Candy, 1991). In addition, it also became clear that CT did not provide an adequate means for defining stage or phase of process.

Transformational learning theory (TLT) provides a framework by which to effectively conceptualize the development of meaning perspectives at the group level. Like constructivism, TLT maintains that meaning is structured by experience and that all individuals function within meaning systems that are complex and dynamic structures of beliefs, theories, and psycho-cultural assumptions: all interacting as a lens through which personal experience is

interpreted (Baumgartner, 2002; Clark, 1993). *Critical reflection* is a process by which underlying assumptions are rationally assessed and critiqued by the individual (Clark, 1993). As information and context changes, a person's meaning scheme can be challenged and changed to better fit a new interpretation of reality. The two sets of theories tend to part ways at this point and TLT contends that changes in those schemes can occur incrementally or suddenly in the event of a "disorienting dilemma" that acts as a catalyst for abrupt change. In the latter case, the resulting *perspective transformation* represents a major developmental, or worldview, shift of the individuals meaning schemes (Tennant & Pogson, 1995; Mezirow (1991).

Other TLT concepts include *dialogue*, or *communicative action*, which occurs when an individual using the platform of his/her particular meaning perspective communicates with another person with the intent of coming to a common understanding, or consensus— thereby validating the meaning of a shared experience (Mezirow, 1991; Habermas, 1971). *Rational discourse* is an outgrowth of this validity-testing process that is employed by individuals when the meaning of a communicated idea is contested and consensus is not possible (Gouldner, 1976). Mezirow, in *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, claims that *rational discourse*, therefore, is one of the key elements of the communicative process and he outlines the optimal conditions for its development and use.

Those factors include:

“... Participants will-

- Have accurate and complete information;
- Be free from coercion and distorting self-deception;
- Be able to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively;
- Be open to alternative perspectives;
- Be able to become critically reflective upon presuppositions and their consequences;
- Have equal opportunity to participate (including the chance to challenge, question, refute and reflect and to hear others do the same), and;
- Be able to accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity” (p.78).

Friere (1973) advocates that the ultimate goal of any such learning experience should result in social change achieved through the transformation of social consciousness and the reconstruction of social structures (Darder, 2002; Clark, 1993). That outcome is achieved through the reciprocal linkage between action and reflection, termed *praxis*, and follows a process by which the learner becomes conscious of the unjust social structures evident in his/her world, comes to understand how those structures have influenced his/her meaning perspectives, recognizes his/her power to change those conditions, and finally, purposefully acts to transform those unequal systems (Friere, 1973).

While I was familiar with TLT, I did not make the connection that it offers a broader framework for studying such complex, comprehensive programs as the MCEC until I was gently urged to do so by my dissertation committee. As part of the research logic cycle, the addition of this conceptual framework serves as an deductive approach to research as TLT emerged as a good fit for explanation of this study's findings after observations/data had been gathered and analyzed (Bowling, 2002).

Mezirow's and Friere's interpretations of TLT are useful in defining the reiterative cycle utilized by MCEC stakeholders and myself as we alternately applied our efforts to create understanding, shared meanings, and consensus at the individual, group, and community levels. The next section lists the four components of that cycle followed by an explanation of each:

- 1) *Analysis of Phase I program operation that provided more complete information to stakeholders regarding how the activities representing the complete set of individual benchmarks related.*

The majority of my early effort in learning to understand what each individual MCEC benchmark represented from the perspectives of prior activities, stakeholder perceptions, and fit within the 1998 community priorities falls into this category. I found that the dissertation proposal outlining the anticipated components of this study and my prior positive relationship with the MCEC program director offered the most assistance at this juncture of my work. In reflection, I am surprised by the fact that my relationship with the director served as a lynchpin regarding the overall success of the study. I have described his

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background, personality, and behavior that willingly assisted the project's development, but I also realize that under alternative conditions, his position as the only paid employee combined with the fact that stakeholders are satisfied with his performance to date, provided him with the capacity and power to halt the study at any point in time. This point is an important consideration for anyone contemplating the replication of this study's methods in another rural community.

This stage represents Mezirow's "need for complete and accurate information" that program stakeholders require as a building block for effective reflective discourse. I previously described the pattern of my fieldwork activities as I examined secondary data, interviewed stakeholders, attended community meetings, triangulated and interpreted observations—all while coordinating the study's design activities with the evaluation planning team. The primary product of this stage is the Benchmark Summary sheets (Appendix A-Tables B1-B3). The creation of these tables, in combination with their editing from key program stakeholders, provided me with a shared understanding regarding the historical aspects of the MCEC.

2) *Development of stakeholder shared meanings regarding the value of past and present program activities.*

The creation of the BRS and the category comparisons are a part of this stage. Considerable time was spent by the director and me in identifying the complete set of milestones that represent all Phase I MCEC activities (see Appendix C). Another important component in establishing common meaning schemes between the director and me involved the ranking of the individual

benchmarks. He and I analyzed each benchmark for developmental history (as indicated by milestones), assigned values, and then tabulated each to produce an overall score. That score then could be compared to other benchmark scores to give stakeholders an index regarding the success and value that each individual project possessed. The BRS statistics provided the basis for the category comparisons (see Table 1, pages 43-45) that gave program leaders the ability to interpret and judge the past activities of all 40-plus benchmarks on an inter- and intra-category basis (i.e., QOL, ED and FSS).

- 3) *Rational discourse through public communication that enabled the group to reach consensus regarding the relationship between the program's past practice and new direction.*

Most of the Progress Team output addressed this transformational learning stage as all previous evaluation activities set the table for these meetings. Appendix D, Tables 1 through 7, summarize the various team activities designed to assist members to reflect upon their assumptions and identify differences/similarities regarding their expectations of community change. These exercises addressed the rational discourse prerequisites of looking at alternative perspectives, weighing evidence and assessing arguments, plus critically reflecting on presuppositions and their consequences (Mezirow, 1991). The community asset and barrier exercise (Appendix D, Table 1) and the SWOT analysis (Appendix D, Table 6) seemed to add the most value in addressing those goals.

4) *Creation of a new set of recommendations and a program action plan.*

In short, all of the effort devoted to transformational learning (e.g., dialogue, common meaning, reflective discourse and consensus building) falls short of the goal if the process does not proceed to initiate social action. It also is the recommended outcome of action research methodology and of Friere's perspective on TLT (Greenwood & Levin 1998; Friere, 1973). In the case of the MCEC program, this stage represents the culmination of all of the activities generated by the first three stages of this study's effort. Indicators of this action stage include the priority list and recommended future action plan developed by the Progress Team (see Appendix D, Table 7), the MCEC Board of Directors approval of that action plan, and the community report summarizing the findings of this study. Admittedly, this action taken by MCEC stakeholders cannot be characterized according to Mezirow's perspective transformation definition, but it does indicate that stakeholders have changed their program's future plans in an incremental manner as a result of this study's activities.

C. Conclusions

1. AE Focus

a. Macro Indicators vs. Local Context

Since the MCEC program maintains the potential of simultaneously supporting the development of 50, or more, benchmarks and virtually targets all Midwestern County residents for a vast variety of community-based services, the ability to isolate the effects of its complex set of efforts from other environmental factors is impossible. Amid this complexity, one responsibility of this mid-term

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program evaluation was to provide evidence of the program's Phase I operational success. This report cited several of those indicators that illustrate the MCEC's performance quality when compared to other USDA-sponsored community building programs via the Internet-based BMS, i.e., high total leveraged dollars, high amount of USDA mortgages written when compared to adjacent counties, and the significant increase in total number of partners at local, regional, state and federal levels.

The program performed well in addressing the various strategies intended by the national EZ/EC legislation of the early 1990s. It expanded its quantity and enhanced its relational quality with a wide-range of partners to bring a solid base of multi-level government and foundation support, plus other forms of technical assistance to the community. It also utilized the USDA funding judiciously in using MCEC monies only in projects that met strict guidelines for leadership and in-kind monetary and staff support. In short, funding was not wasted on projects that demonstrate small potential for sustainable impact. The program also employed an empowered approach when it created the list of citizen priorities in 1998 that featured a process of identifying issues and needs during a series of community meetings and resident surveys. Most of this work was accomplished under the cloud of a national economic recession and in spite of working with an operating budget of one-tenth the amount that the community's leaders originally anticipated.

A more convincing story of MCEC performance is told through an understanding of the program's local context and how it fits within the culture,

values, priorities and other characteristics that make the community it serves unique. This study has found strong evidence that this grass-roots-driven program is effective in its focus on facilitating comprehensive community change—given enough time. So many of the issues named by the Midwestern County community in 1998 were not immediately accessible by MCEC attention until some sort of basic capacity was created. Much of the Phase I program's work was devoted to facilitating the institutionalization of that capacity so that Phase II effort can now effectively address more of the original priorities named in 1998. Now that the major pieces of that foundation are in place, the program can continue to expand its level of assistance to the community's service organizations in response to new opportunities and/or threats as they emerge.

b. Low-performing Benchmarks

The reasons for several of the low-performing benchmarks were identified. Those reasons included: 1) initiatives tied to one partner for expected leadership and that organization no longer is active with the MCEC, and 2) projects for which the MCEC has no political or economic clout to affect the desired change. Several of the low-ranking benchmarks have potential, however, as new funding opportunities and/or new partners are identified. Over the course of this evaluation's field work stage, at least two such scenarios emerged—the small business assistance initiative request for proposal from a major foundation and the home visiting health organization's co-proposal with the MCEC in requesting the purchase and support for use of home-based monitors for low-income senior patients.

c. Program Infrastructure

One cannot fully discuss the operating dynamics of the MCEC program without mentioning the high quality of work by the director and the team of volunteers who create, implement, and evaluate its various activities. Previous sections of this paper described the entrepreneurial behavior of the director, plus how his background and attitude contribute to his effectiveness in directing a program that changes its management requirements on a daily basis. This paper also outlined studies that researched the necessary components of effective teams, and I observed that the volunteer group of MCEC stakeholders share that range of diverse backgrounds and personalities needed for collaborative group success.

d. Future of the MCEC

This program is at a crossroad of its operation. In its first phase, stakeholders put the majority of their effort into enhancing the community's capacity to respond in a timely manner to emerging opportunities, and threats, by institutionalizing infrastructure. In the second phase, two primary set of tasks emerge as a result of a new direction and are a part of the recommendations listed in the previous section. They include: 1) recruiting, training and, enlisting a new cohort of community leaders to assist the core group of existing volunteers as new programs are created and implemented utilizing the infrastructure the MCEC helped to create in its initial years of operation, and 2) mainstreaming the self-evaluation effort that began with this study through the MCEC's sponsorship of an on-going Progress Team.

The second item represents a critical change from the Phase I operation of the program. It entails the closer monitoring of the program's activities in regards to the program's stakeholders shared meaning as to how best to transform the Midwestern County community and ultimately will alter the manner in which the program "does business" by building and sustaining a more evaluative culture (Barnette & Wallis, 2003; Duignan, 2003). So much of the effort to date was directed at building basic capacity that one could argue that a full blown, contextual evaluation was not warranted—especially given the facts that the program met the annual reporting requirements specified by the USDA. Many comments from MCEC stakeholders over the course of this evaluation affirmed the observation that they placed top priority on supporting projects that led to tangible outcomes in a reasonable amount of time. It is difficult to argue with that contention as the menu of potential benchmarks with readily-identifiable objectives was so large in Phase I program operation that support for evaluation waned due to its reputation among stakeholders for producing intangible results.

e. Self-reflection on AE Activities

At the time of this writing, it has been nearly three months since the MCEC mid-term evaluation concluded its fieldwork. Frequent conversations between the MCEC director and me during that elapsed time lead to the conclusion that many of the benchmark summary statistics generated for this report are now out of date. Indicators of that changing environment include: several new projects have emerged on the MCEC work plan due to new request for proposal announcements; new USDA-RD staff members who are now in place at the

regional and state levels, and; the continuing, constant staff turnover within local human service agencies that causes the MCEC program staff to identify, invite, and orientate new volunteers to the program planning table.

The findings of this study also quickly evolve into a point-in-time analysis and the true value of its work will emerge only as the program's stakeholders continue to employ its practices and procedures to tweak the program's logic model as they integrate evaluation strategies with other planning activities. Toward that end, program leaders already have taken an important first step as they have contracted me to assume a number of roles, including coordinating the USDA housing program application previously described, leading the development of the small business initiative, and directing the new Progress Team evaluation activities.

There will always be a high degree of risk and stress associated with running this program—if it is not facing the elimination of the program's federal funding, then it may be losing a key USDA technical assistance provider; if it is not losing a local partner that supported the salary of a subcontracted MCEC benchmark position, then it is quickly finding another source to replace that exiting partner or lose the program position altogether. The ability to respond to an environmental change with multi-level implications, either of a positive or threatening nature, with a timely and informed decision using a network of knowledgeable and active stakeholders is the paramount outcome of the MCEC to date.

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2. Self-reflection on EP Activities

I must admit that one of my early goals regarding output from the two Progress Team meetings was a fully developed logic model for each new and existing benchmark. Several field-based observations quickly informed me that this expectation was far removed from reality as it became apparent that very little Phase I work of the MCEC was devoted to formal strategic planning of individual benchmarks. In analyzing the BRS total points per category (QOL, ED, and FSS) only 2-3 percent of the total milestone points received by benchmarks in the ranking process were attributed to identifying or creating medium- or long-term outcomes (in QOL 6 out of 192 total points were generated from those intermediate- and long-term categories; in ED-4 of 216 total points, and; in FSS-6 of 259) (See Appendix F, Benchmark Milestones-Total Points per Category). It was evident in the recruitment and invitation phases of assembling the Progress Team that the amount of member's time to devote to such meetings was in short supply. As the agenda was created and unfolded over the course of the two meetings, it was apparent that the group was very comfortable in an advisory role that focused on giving macro-level direction to the program, not specific action plans for individual projects. Therefore, my adjusted expectation for the team's output was that members would use the various tools developed to rank and compare benchmark past performance as a basis to reach consensus (through dialog and/or rational discourse) and inform the creation of a new action plan for the final phase of the program's operation. I believe that goal was realized as indicated by the various outputs of the team.

That group's vote on the post-meeting surveys expressing a willingness to participate on a MCEC evaluation work team is the best evidence that they wish to be stronger force in the long term, formal strategic planning and review process of the program. While the other suggestions provided by the Progress Team regarding overall program direction (e.g., the senior survey, the small business initiative, the medical emergency care center, and the assisted living care facility) swing on factors that are not under the direct control of the MCEC program leaders, the development of an evaluation culture through the sponsorship of an ongoing Progress Team is within their influence.

D. Future Study

The following quotation is taken from the Annie E. Casey Foundation commissioned report, *Voices from the Empowerment Zones: Insights about Launching Large-scale Community Revitalization Initiatives* (Joseph & Levy, 2002):

Often we don't take time to capture the real stories and the real experiences. A lot of times what it takes to get to an outcome is a lot more than what is seen in the public eye. That's the part of the work that really makes the difference, that's the capacity building, that's the change that will last over a long period of time... People need to hear that we were able to build some new neighborhood relationships and truly begin to empower some communities to make decisions, not just on economic development, but on the whole array of social interventions. That's a powerful message. The strategic approach taken from some of the

Empowerment Zones suggests a different kind of model of neighborhood revitalization than what most cities are doing right now. What cities basically do now are fund institutions to provide services, rather than trying to grow neighborhood intelligence or build local capacity. I think this is a very exciting story (p. 1).

The above passage applies to the operation of the MCEC if one substitutes “rural community” for “neighborhood” at several places. This dissertation has laid out the background and current impetus underlying the growth of community building initiatives across the country. It has also set that comprehensive approach within an action model emphasizing the collaborative process. Evaluating such programs is a difficult task due to their complexity of subsystem interaction; focus on long-range goals, plus emergent nature of implicit and explicit theories at the design and implementation stages (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1997). By adhering to an evaluation approach that utilized action research methods and a conceptual framework that employed an inductive-deductive cycle utilizing constructivist and transformational learning theories, this study not only addressed the current and future needs of the program stakeholders and of the community, but also, adds to the literature that examines these rural programs within their local context. Toward that end, it helps inform the debate concerning the efficacy of these holistic endeavors by community leaders contemplating a similar process, by policy makers and philanthropic organizations that consider funding them, and by practitioners who are interested in replicating similar studies in other rural communities.

1. Integrate Evaluation Practice with Program Design

The need to integrate evaluation methods with the initial stages of program planning is a critically missing piece of the effort to increase accountability of community-based programs. Many community development practitioners define evaluation not as a process that helps improve their program, but instead by the tools commonly used to carryout summative evaluations. Those who require program evaluation often speak of “doing an evaluation” in terms of hiring a professional outside evaluator who will offer a turn-key study that hopefully meets the clients needs and budget. The focus is more on the development of survey questionnaires, facilitating effective focus group meetings, or other evaluative tools, than spending the time to first learn the unique contextual variables that contribute heavily to the past and current operation of the program (Chavis, 2003; Stake, 1995). Better use of logic models that facilitate the process of integrating ongoing evaluation practice with program planning and implementation is needed. This method of illustrating a program’s vision is especially useful at a program’s design phase as indicators are established upfront to measure how resources and activities are being effectively linked to projected outcomes in accordance with stakeholder shared meaning schemes relating to community transformation (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2001).

2. Expand Dialogue Among Community Building Programs

Another area for future study is the use of this evaluation’s basic framework to evaluate other USDA-funded EC programs around the country. As part of this study, I had the opportunity to interview several program directors

who lead similar comprehensive community building initiatives to the MCEC. That investigation led me to the conclusion that the system represented by the Internet-based BMS is not adequately serving the full spectrum of evaluation requirements of those program leaders. I believe it would be of great value to most of the USDA-funded, community building initiatives' leaders to apply, and customize as needed, this study's template. That effort would be an important first step in linking these diverse programs across the country together in dialogue, and rational discourse if need be, with the ultimate purpose of creating common perspectives in respect to the range of practices in rural community development.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Transcripts of Progress Team Meetings

Midwestern Economic Development Team Notes 5/26/04

We're in the home stretch.

That was hard wasn't it?

I agree, we can't estimate the time, and we can't estimate the amount of money or anything if you don't know.

I sensed everyone was struggling with that, also with the money issue, was lingering over the discussion too.

Also, another part of the discussions I heard around was, well, maybe one of the top priorities is still having a relationship with a local economic development corporation. Why is that even realistic because that is an annual contract; that's an annual payment involved—so you have to continue listing that as a top priority. There was that kind of debate over here and I heard similar sorts of things being debated around the table.

Certainly, over the two days this has been mentioned over and over—one of the top accomplishments in the counties and it has been very, very useful.

What I am going to do is ask each group to summarize just in a minute or so, just a couple or maybe just one, what a top priority was—and just talk about your group discussion just for a second. We'll go around the group, and I am not going to write anything down right then, and then I'm going to come back and take all three groups and charts together. We're going to have a verbal discussion about what might be the top priority out of all three. We'll begin listing them here. Then I'm going to take us through a quick activity chart where I'm going to ask you to share one or two of the next tasks necessary, what to do and how to do it. We will do a little timeline or what to do on a timeline. We want to leave a good start on a new activity chart. We want to start with the group leaders.

Group 1.

#11.5 Contract, #11.1-11.3 Midwestern Industrial parks—making sure they continue on, #24. Enhanced Community Leadership—train more people to participate in community development.

Eliminate informational access disparities in the county

New Benchmark: to become more user-friendly

1.1 ...

Thank you very much...very nice job on all three groups.

Let me ask... are there some obvious benchmarks right off the bat that we're missing here, that you really think you need to add as priorities—your recommendations to the group?

Appendix A (continued)

Well, we really didn't address housing.

Where do we see that? Which part of the housing?

Well, as I said, we are trying to refocus the roll of several of those into a benchmark with subheadings, because it makes a whole lot more sense to address housing as housing. We have been taking it as an individual task. I think we are now at the point where we need to roll with the government, we've got a lot of the individual pieces... and that's a... (pause)

Basically, that assisted living, the whole thing with housing advocacy, rentals, and account applications. We have a process..., the one thing we identified that when people were trying to find assistance for housing that they were being sent to five or six different agencies and everybody had their own set of paperwork. And so far we've been fairly successful in being able to do that. We've got everybody to agree that we all can use the USDA Rural Development set, and we pull from that. So we can do that in a central spot now. But, that's all continuing kind of stuff.

OK, so that's pretty much your assessment.

I am curious.

Back to this group up here, you had the contract with (local economic development corp.) and yet you listed as a need for a new benchmark as one-stop-shop. How do you reconcile those two? Isn't that what your contract with (local economic dev. corp.) is doing?

Answer

(Inaudible gap...)

Finding a site and getting incentives in place, I suppose, is that typical?

Right.

Like he has said, you have someone come in who doesn't know how to build but they go and they want to build their own home... before they're done getting off (???), they're going to hate everyone because of all the things you have to go through.

Don't you get off (????) at the courthouse?

No, No.

It depends on what township you live in and what permits they have to have and what inspectors, various things like that.

I think that one thing that is important to think about here and I should have mentioned it when I was doing the benchmark review this morning; we are involved in the very early stages of (local economic development corp.) I'm asking them to take a larger role in our small business development, in regard to these types of things.

We had a short meeting a couple of weeks ago. Currently (county official) is doing some research... We are hoping (a local economic development corporation) will help. I think that is going to happen.

Appendix A (continued)

...call it SBI—small business initiative

How is that different from the Small Business Development Center, which I know you put in place?

Well, the Small Business Development Center is their own organization and they have a very specific purpose of preparing business plans for people and doing all the individual business counseling and that kind of thing.

Well, what we need is do is to have somehow, first of all, one of the issues that we have that we talked about this, and we talked about this, was we would like to do something with this and have this loan fund; but they're not the appropriate place for that to be. They shouldn't be doing counseling and this kind of thing. So, we have to figure out how we're going to do that. So maybe the way to do would be that is to have lower Michigan or someone else be the host agency who is going to do that. So what we're trying to do is, we're trying to pick up from the services or where these services basically leave off and what we need to do to pick up and give the assistance—and what we need to do to provide for her to be able to provide to the clients. You know, we are very fortunate that the regional office here is our accountant, I'll tell you that. But we are fortunate to have the regional office here (of the Small Business Technology Development Centers) because that affords us more service, no question about it. But we need to do that! We have talked with XXXX and several organizations about partnerships and various other things about some potential there so...

We added the small business, residential one-stop shop.

I added the housing and the assisted living care.

Is there anyone else that would like to add before we start our discussion?

...

It is easier to get your (high school equivalency degree) in jail.

Michigan Works! has a program.

...

I would still like to see a senior asset survey.

We would love to tie that into our program too, an asset to these communities to work with these kids—a compilation of skills.

We've got action steps going like crazy.

Out of all the discussions going over the past 20 minutes.

Think about, which the first one is...it doesn't really matter what is number one, ...we just want to get a top 5 or a top 8 or top ten. Can I hear what we should list in the next 5 years? What is the most important thing that the county needs to do out of your benchmarks.

The economic development contract—11.5 & 11.1 thru 3—Industrial parks that work

Jobs

...(inaudible) ...(talk about jobs and youth, mentoring and where this fits)

Appendix A (continued)

I'm going to put that up here as 16.1

Educating for kids [more discussion] Tutoring after school, mentoring for youth.

To continue to writing our action plan. Let's look at the benchmarks up here.

I don't want to forge ahead....the agricultural development, and there's also the small business development.

Small grants.

Let's pull you back. In our discussion, you tell me what are our priorities here?

Small business development loans.

And is that a benchmark? Yes, that is a benchmark. The Small Business Initiative? Yes.

I think we need to keep in mind that for the scope of our problem is such that \$250,000 a year is not going to solve our problems. We need to be looking at what we can use that \$250,000 to leverage outside funds, and outside agencies to come in and actually solve the problem, not us just throwing a lot of money at a problem and trying to solve it by ourselves.

You guys are seeding, like gardeners, sewing seeds, planting seeds.

Right.

Assisted living and housing.

BenchmarkAssisted living 18.10 with 18.7 - Housing advocacy.

Agricultural development.

[individual discussions ensue]

Guys, we are going to come back and do the actual tasks on these individual ones, but right now let's finish up on our actual lists.

Is there more work to be done with the (farmers market?) overall issue of development of the Agri-business?

The farmers market has become a 501c3 and we want them to move along on their own.

[Discussions on farmers' market progress]

This is obviously a rough draft... Your administrator will be making one better for you.

I think we actually have a list of ten things...

Yes, housing is on there.

[Review of chart.....10 most important things]

So, there are ten activities to take on.

I hesitate to say one is ahead of number ten. My guess is that is not that much different than the list we just made. I think it is important to say that ten is not less than one—because ten things are do-able over five.

Do you want to leave that open or do you want to prioritize them?

Well, I think we need to leave that open. We will work on these as the way things emerge because of funding and various other situations.

Oh my ... [exclamation from the group]

Appendix A (continued)

[Discussion] Property issue for (a Small City) fund. Any other issue there? Are they going to do a 425? They don't have the property but they have the sewer water and road?

Yes.

The county airport owns the property. There is a 25 year-old agreement with the airport that needs to be redone. There are issues with the clauses on the property.

Is it under 425 right now?

No.

There's just an agreement with the airport and the airport authority.

They may mean that they may need to find a whole new piece of property.

The property we have at the airport is suitable for one type of development.

There are issues because there will be high utility users.

In order to make the (a Small City) project the best that it could be, we want to do the same as we have done with (other small cities).

Are (Small City C) and Midwestern City – are we all set on those?

Yes, we're home.

The big task, then, they need to resolve a semi-complicated issue here with the (a small city) property. Is that fair to say?

The tasks are individual.

Are the two of the three done?

Partly the thing is, is that these things never seem to come to closure. Can you understand what I'm saying?...

Ya.

(County administrator) , do you have sense of the timeline on the (a Small City) property issue here... is there something being done here?

Yes.

Seriously?

How many people are employed? When I think about the (A small city) Industrial Park.

Transfers—they employ quite a few people. That's it? Well, ya.

Well, when you think of (energy company) is out there... quite a few people are employed.

We've already decided that this is a benchmark up here, we just need to go through the task of how we are going to get it done. The timeline is what we are on...and (MCEC director) and (County official) seem to be saying that the property issue seems to be eminent, I guess. I'm just going to put eminent. I was interested in talking some more about last week...possibilities... broadband.

It isn't broadband. That's why we're working on LinkMichigan. Because if you get a call someday, from the call center and they are a business that are very

Appendix A (continued)

environmentally friendly and they require very little utility other than electricity and Broadband.

Thank you, I put that up here, you're exactly right.

So (MCEC director) , the LinkMichigan...your plan is done and you're ahead of the game.

I think we can make the statement right now, if anybody came to our community, to locate and broadband was a necessity, I believe we could do it right now.

You could get a loan from the broadband authority?

Well, the fact that I now have the suppliers in the area, and we can look at a combination of wireless, fiber—we understand what we have. We didn't know two years ago where the fiber optics lay in this county. Mapping of that fiber optics was a great start, because we know where it is.

Is there going to be any exchange of money on the Harrison property?

Well, we have earmarked \$20,000 right now, and it's been there for a while.

Should I add the broadband.

Well I have \$50,000 set aside right now.

Expand family enrichment

Family mentoring and family enrichment.

Teen pregnancy program.

There is no money for this benchmark right now.

Wait a minute, first, what would be examples of the first three tasks to do?

To identify a benchmark.

I assume this person will do a benchmark study?

We can help in the benchmark study, but we need someone to champion the effort.

We need someone to be a committee chair.

This person would do the study.

Really, you would expect the committee chair to do the study.

We would help them financially to do the study or whatever.

Well, that person would do the footwork.

Meeting and organization.

Any idea off the top of your head who that might be?

Schools, volunteers.

A lady from Midwestern City— XXX High School.

I think this should go to the volunteer centers. It seems to go there. It may accomplish a couple of things.

If you have some money to put behind it, it may strengthen some aspects of your volunteers. Seems to me like this would be good.

This strikes me as a lot of a heavy duty programmatic effort, not just volunteer, and a lot a major program design involved in this.

Appendix A (continued)

I think we have a lot of potential agencies who would be willing to do this.

I think it is a matter of making a program fit.

I don't think any one agency ...

Is alternative education an agency by itself?

No.

It's part of Midwestern schools.

Intermediate or regular school?

It is regular school, High School.

(A Small City) has an alternative high school, too.

What about putting the two alternative high schools with the volunteer center?

Is the alternative person part-time? You may have to pay that person to do...

Let's just leave that volunteer aside for a minute.

We need to identify a benchmark leader.

Is it possible for the two alternative high school principals could co-chairs?

That's what I said. But then you have three schools...

Would need somebody to coordinate volunteers.

But that's the benchmark chair's problem to try and figure out what the connections are, right?

Does anyone know any of these individuals, in charge of these schools? The chairs from these two schools?

The youth-at-risk core group would be a good place for this to land.

(A youth group) will be meeting soon, I think they're meeting in June as a matter of fact to talk about what the function is of that group and where they are going.

The timing would be perfect.

Ok, let's say we do that.

(County human service collaborating board) will be thrilled to meet and (MCEC director) will invite them to be a chair of this pretty big task.

This pretty broad task.

We have been working with them, this is actually no surprise.

We would have to put together the concepts, so it would have to be program design.

Before community development?

I think so.

I think we need to get an idea of where we are going with this...if you can't send this out to a committee without some design work ahead of time.

Would the core be mentoring?

Yes.

The timeline....when are we going to contact (county human service collaborative board)?

June. June 2004.

Let's put on here for fun, when we want the program design started? Assuming the chairs agree.

Appendix A (continued)

When will program design be started?

At the end of school,
yesterday.

What will be built? What kind of seed money? What are they going to want? Are they going to want to bring a consultant on to help in the program design? There has to be some work there, sit down and take a snapshot of where we are at...and that whole thing.

\$10, 000 would be a conservative estimate.

The cultural sensitivity group. What would be the number one task to accomplish that?

Expand Character Counts! I hear a lot of these guys' names mentioned a lot here.

Character Counts! Coalition is the benchmark leader. We have the coalition. But what is the first step, and what do you mean by expand? What is the idea? Expand the idea. I would say to expand Character Counts! but maybe coming out with another program. We were talking about the mentoring thing too, that these children need to be mentored and if they can't be mentored, by their parents or whatever—parents are too busy—then maybe a citizen can come up with a program, and then incorporate, you know. We had no timeline for the program, just something for us to look at.

A possible need for additional mentoring focus group.

And who is going to have that discussion with Character Counts!?

We need additional programs in addition to Character Counts!, not expand Character Counts, but add programs to help all these kids.

And who might be the benchmark champion of that effort?

And she is not here.

What do you think (MCEC director)?

I am trying to sort out the difference between that and the mentoring piece, trying to see if this overlaps here.

Character Counts! is doing mentoring right now?

No, but we have been talking about doing mentoring.

What Character Counts! is expanded into right now is they are doing business ethics, in the adult community and expanding into that. We've talked about possibly offering the judicial people something as a step of probation or a condition of probation, doing character education for their clients.

Seems like a natural fit there.

There's lots of discussion.

There's also a (youth) program as well.

That's what we were talking about, that we need to work together on this.

Because, the idea really too is not only mentoring, but a motivational thing... to get these kids fired up about something. His is like a motivational project too, like

Appendix A (continued)

the parks and rec. where we're getting some sports into it. Programs for the young adults and children too, get them motivated.

At sports and recreation we're trying to develop a few sports-type programs, summer program, whatever. And we're talking that we have the base of kids - they're already there, if we could just develop the sports side, mingle the two and mix the two together, we could have a up and running program for them, without having to go and search for kids.

Or we could expand the (youth development) program.

If I can, if we could bring it back to...

These are details your administrator needs to sort out.

The ethics and character as a benchmark... are you still sure you want to put it up here?

I know it is important but I'm really confused; it seems this has already being covered somewhere?

We worked on this as three separate groups. We could collaborate—we have the same kind of ideas. This isn't an issue, whether we combine it or whatever.

The importance of having it as a separate benchmark is that it is a way of assuring that it is incorporated into the other entities.

Maybe the fact that it came up in two separate groups, indicates that it's a high priority, and obligates it to be right there... The concept needs to be there.

Ok, I'm going to leave it there then. I said "need for additional mentor focus programs in role model program" and I don't know what more to do with it at the moment. I'm going to put one more task which is to remind us ...where mentoring belongs and throw June on here for the board to have a date to talk about that issue.

Question on kids and sports... [inaudible]

I don't think there is any support for that anymore is there?

This leads right into our recreational...

The original concept appropriation program that we were talking about was a county parks and recs providing a roving leader to go from township to township to build a summer or after school and summer-type program for kids in that township, or intramural between townships one day a week. Rove around, start out around five so he's there M-F, a different township each day-have a once a week type program for kids in each township. What we were talking about then was combining that with the school districts and meld that together as a single program rather than separate programs in individual townships.

... [inaudible comments]

There is no county recreation?

The roving leader would do that. Do that for ya.

We've never had a county parks and recreation commission before.

Appendix A (continued)

What should be the task number on of the county parks and recreation commission?

Hire a director, a leader in order to set up these little... that's what you need... a leader... yes, yes. Right now would be great, a start.

The roving leader was our start.

Is that part of the general fund of the county?

We have limited money to use.

So a fund raiser from local governments is a step one.

The plan was to have five or six townships throw in if they wanted to participate in this.

So you raise money to hire somebody. What is the next step after that?

Well, we really need the money to start with, but right now we have very limited funds.

Our prime goal is to develop a program, visibility, convince the public that this program is a viable one that we should have, and then three years down the road go to the public and ask for a millage to make it sustainable. That's it in a nutshell. We figure it would take at least three years and some proof to get people to pass a millage.

So, no where do you have a leader planned in there.

No, we do It's in the works, I guess.

... [inaudible]

So you have five really good tasks down there that you are working on

What you really have to prove is that it is worthwhile.

What would we be looking at as far as going out to raise funds as far as engaging on doing that?

September

We have to wait for the grant in order to be able to provide the service.

We have to have this in place before we can ask anyone for funding.

... [inaudible]

The park, yes.

A building?

No, playground, walking trails.

See, we need the grant in order to hire somebody to help develop the product.

The problem is that the local township hall or center is not used a lot of the time.

The kids in the township don't have transportation to get to the place, even in the township. Even in the township they don't live close to the township building.

I would think we need some sort of transit pickup that would take them to the center and back. They're looking for kids to be in that center.

That's why the 21st Century grant will be successful, we built transportation into that.

We took a good chunk of that grant to provide transportation.

Hey, how much is your grant requesting?

Are you putting any match in that grant?

\$11,000

Appendix A (continued)

Is that match coming from you, (MCEC director)?

It's a combination

See, you have some money in this?

How much are you in for, or will be in for on that grant?

\$40,000

\$40,000, right now.

You may have to put in an additional \$20, 000.

We have \$80,000, total

Should I put down \$20,000?

Well, we have monies protected, right now. We've already put money into the project

The reason this is so perplexing, until we know about the grant is in the next few weeks, we can't go forward.

Apparently, again there is a large amount of money.

We are not spending any money here, what is happening here?

As before, it's not the money, but the coordination. The benchmarks leaders and collaboration of making it work.

The small business development, the revolving loan fund, the one-stop shop—that's what we're talking about here when we talk about the small business development initiative. Apparently the first step has already taken place.

What would be the next step beyond that?

Would be to establish the ...

How do you do that? Where do you get the money from?

We think maybe the Michigan Economic Corporation is going to do that.

Are you talking about using MCEC money to establish the revolving loan fund.

Maybe we can leverage our money through USDA or something else, you know.

How much, how much are you going to put in... can you take a guess?

You don't have that money allocated right now then? This would be new money.

Very similar to the recreation plan, you got to have somebody in place.

When might you establish the revolving loan fund?

I would say by the end of 2004.

What might the very next task after establishing the revolving loan fund?

Building business incubators.

You mean brick and mortar?

Possibly.

We need a benchmark to do it.

Ok, you need a benchmark study first?

Well, we think this is one of the things that we'll need to look at.

Benchmark and study for incubator.

That could roll in to the incubator kitchen as well.

That's alright, these are good topics.

By the way, we have funded half of two incubator kitchen studies around the state.

Appendix A (continued)

I think Rural Development did the other half.

The benchmarking and study for the incubator should begin by Spring 2005?

Ya, ya.

You will probably have to pay for half of it. Maybe 40.

Assisted living care facility

Identify benchmark leader

Any ideas who that might be?

Could (Small City) Housing Commission, we're looking at a number of ways.

We would go with a private investor if we had somebody to do it.

We can, we could, and we've come up with name over the years, just businesses.

(MCEC director), right now, (MCEC director), sounds like you are primarily handling it.

Yes, right now we are driving the train.

We went to (Small City D-located in adjacent county)

We're working on this.

Who is we?

Me and the MCEC housing counselor, the housing applicant.

The assisted housing issue is this...we applied twice for funding. We were unsuccessful in getting that funding. The reason being is that the depth of our market study, so we know we have to re-do that. So right away I know that the cost on that is going to be 25 thousand.

(MCEC director), you know what needs to be done, as far as the group—is this a time—does someone else need to be in charge rather than you here?

We need to find partners, and a benchmark leader.

We're thinking MSHDA, they may be a major partner.

We need the benchmark leader.

I think getting the study done will help in getting the benchmark leader.

Sounds like this time you know how to get it done.

We're fixing it.

To get the study done...I'd like to look at it immediately.

I am going to say July 2005

Now, is that money already allocated?

There's \$17,500 allocated.

(MCEC director), that's not enough, so put another 10 with it.

Might, MSHDA?

So you get the study, you are going to submit that back to HUD?

We don't know, we think probably USDA is a better match for us.

(MCEC director), we need to think about assisted living is not wonderful for most people.

Exactly.

Let me tell you why we went to (Small City C) .

(Small City C) is an example of starting with independent living and totally unsubsidized right through assisted nursing. We know we have to be

Appendix A (continued)

Medicare/Medicaid eligible in order to survive. So we have been looking for the mop and we think with (Small City C) we have found the mop because they do complete continual care. I just talked to them Thursday.

The one's that are successful are part of continuous care.

Let's branch that discussion into our housing advocacy. I feel better now because we are already over budget now. We had \$90, 000.

The housing advocacy position?

We support housing advocacy.

Are you saying that we want to make sure to continue to fund that position?

Well, this is what drives our whole housing initiative.

We are three quarters of that person.

... [inaudible]

We are all set, we don't need any more funds.

We are sliding into home plate.

We don't know what (a local university's) next steps are. We need to talk to (a local university) and pull stuff together.

We never really had true emergency services—just a doctor's office, no x-ray or anything.

We need to identify with (a local university) the next steps are for their study.

Who is going to engage?

There may be an additional study. The old study won't help us anymore.

... [inaudible]

(MCEC director), you are doing a lot of the legwork right now, a superb administrator.

END OF TAPE 2

Progress Team

Notes 5/26/04 Tape #3, side A

Farmers' Market final plan

Let people make their product, use the kitchen so it is licensed.

Then help them with how to jar it, label it, market and distribute it.

They need a business plan

They need access to the site?... it's a handshake agreement—there's no 20 year...

Need to complete land agreement

This is all part of the business plan.

Finish business plan.

(A youth development program) can't finish their final plan until the land site is approved.

The land agreement may be a year away.

[Soft talk...]

We need a long term to start building roads, and building buildings...

Appendix A (continued)

I certainly saw a lot of Farmers' Markets proposed in these Cool City grants that people just wrote.

Did Midwestern City and Small City B do a Cool city grant? Yes, but it was declined, or they were going to, but...

This is really not a downtown operation. The full expansion of this with the kitchen and the five years of the plant—it's a big operation.

There would have much greater chance of our interest if it were in a downtown in all honesty... I really wish it would have been downtown on Main Street somehow. If it were in downtown, I think we could actually talk right now.

It's all about money.

I know.

I'm not making any promise at all—it would be an unusual leap, but I think as an agency, we are ready to make unusual leaps to support downtown. We feel

Farmers' markets

should be ...

On the record?

No.

You said it.

Then, I was not making a promise

All I'm saying is, if you came to me and had a plan that was a Farmer's market in the downtown area, and we need some assistance—we could talk.

That's what our boss says to do. It's just emphasized.

Yes, it is anti-sprawl.

Is there any new money, (MCEC director), for this, any other money that is involved?

No, we just need to see where it's going.

Guys, we have gone through ten activities, I doubt that it is complete, but it gives a good start.

I think we have set some wonderful priorities.

Yesterday, we stepped back and looked at the big picture of Midwestern County. Today, (the evaluator) and (MCEC director) have drawn us in and we have been specific in drawing priorities, benchmarks, money, how, and even identifying a few people who might be responsible for some of the tasks. Maybe we educated ourselves and maybe we made some connections that we might not have been fully aware of before.

I thought this was a great two days!

I'm pleased that you invited us up to help with this process.

Kudos and conclusion from facilitator.

Applause.

For all of you here you will be getting copies of this.

(The evaluator) will be pulling this all together over the next several weeks. Part of our plan is that I want to take this to Washington when we get all done with it. I think we need to tell our story there as well as here in Michigan.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Table B1. Benchmark Summary of Quality of Life of Midwestern County Enterprise Community Program

QOL—Improved Quality of Life

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Target	Goal(s)	Benchmark #	Objective(s)	1998 \$ Request	1998 Partners- L/R/S/F**	Total EC Alloc/Spent	Output—Primary Project/ Program To Date	Current All Partners L/R/S/F**	Total \$ Rec. (Partner) (not inc. EC)
Physical atmosphere	Improve countywide comprehensive land use planning	1.1	Create/implement a coordinated land use plan	\$112,000	5/1/0/1	\$5,000 / \$175	Countywide comprehensive master plan created, Citizen Planner workshop held	5/1/2/0	\$65,227
	Improve use of natural resources	2.1	Establish recycling programs; Establish countywide blight ordinance.	\$692,700	8/2/1/0	\$3,000 / 0	Blight ordinances created in 16/19 gov't entities; Scrap tire clean-up/elec. recycle. project; Solid waste coord. hired, Brownfield Redev. Auth. created	3/1/1/0	\$905,845
Community behavior	Improve cultural sensitivity; Promote ethics and character education for adults and children	4.1	Develop/operate cultural sensitive education program; Support ethics & substance abuse ed.	\$27,250	1/0/0/0	\$16,000 / \$1790	Character Counts! provided to County schools and businesses; 2004 Small City After-Prom Party and Ethics in Sports program supported	2/2/1/0	\$1,000
	Improve recreational opportunities for all residents	5.1	Establish/operate a comprehensive recreation plan and department	\$1,654,500	6/2/1/0	\$80,000 / \$40,000	Citizen need's assessment/ strategic plan dev.; Citywide rec. plan/commission created	6/1/3/0	\$74,301
Culture / Leisure / Recreation	Increase community art/cultural events	6.1	Create/operate a countywide arts council	\$151,500	4/1/0/0	\$15,000 / \$15,000	Arts Council started/created Community Cultural Plan; Several projects completed	5/1/1/0	\$3,575
	Improve infrastructure	7.1	Improve roads by developing brine well	\$2,002,500	2/1/1/0	\$0 / \$0	None	0/0/0/0	\$0
Infrastructure	Improve infrastructure	7.2	Build a tunnel for safer Amish travel	None-yr.3	4/1/0/0	\$10,000 / \$0	None	0/0/0/0	\$0
	Improve public transportation	8.1	Provide 24/7 transit service	None	2/1/1	\$0 / \$0	None	0/0/0/0	\$0
Seniors	Better utilize senior talents; Increase intergen.activities	10.1	Establish/operate a county wide volunteer center	\$90,000	2/2/0/0	\$10,000 / \$10,000	Started/operate Volunteer Center in Small City	1/0/0/1	\$92,697
	Improve network that addresses senior safety issues	10.2	Start/operate a TRIAD	\$65,700	1/0/0/1	\$5,000 / \$0	Facilitated TRIAD potential partner meeting	0/0/0/0	\$0
Resident safety	Address community safety issues	23	Improve system that ensures safety of residents by supporting disaster preparedness activities	BM est.2002	NA	\$5,000 / \$0	Countywide early warning sirens upgrade; Improvements to township facilities regarding disaster preparedness	3/0/0/1	\$1,463,377

**Partner Categories – Local / Regional / State / Federal

Table B1 (cont'd)

QOL—Improved Quality of Life

Benchmark #	K In-Kind \$	L ECBD Disc.	M Bchmk Score	N Quadrant	O Comments	P Short Term Plan (1-2 Years)
1.1	\$40,000	14	27	3		Public hearings of master plan scheduled through late 2004; township & adjacent communities must also review; then Midwestern County Commission can adopt
2.1	\$5,532	18	31	4		Recycle scrap tire chips w/Health Dept assistance; Continue to work with townships that do not have blight ordinances; implement electronic recycling program
4.1	\$46,974	17	25	3	Over 3200 children and adults trained through Character Counts! (as of 4/04) at work sites, after school programs, in-school classes, seminars and other special events	Continue to support expansion of number of trainers and number of community members trained with Character Counts! curriculum; Support other school district's After-Prom Parties
5.1	\$47,942	16	30	4	21st Century Learning grants received / 2 unsuccessful proposals prior to EC/ EC support letters assisted securing grants/ EC facilitated negotiation with local transit regarding after program student transport	WIN proposal will fund 3-yr operation of Parks & Recreation Commission; Begin process of raising community awareness regarding scope and importance of that Commission; Review and adapt recreation plan on regular intervals (?)
6.1	\$1,300	21	29	4		Facilitate process that encourages Art Council to become independent of EC support via public awareness campaign, fundraising, identification of alternative funding sources, etc.
7.1	\$0	0	1	1		
7.2	\$0	0	1	1		
8.1	\$0		2	1	Midwestern Transit grant (rec.2002) for extended eve. & weekend did not rec. enough riders	
10.1	\$0	0	20	3	Volunteer Center sponsored Learning to Serve, youth HOPE, Yard Clean-up, Community Gardens	Support continued independent operation of Volunteer Center—as requested and via referrals/promotion of Center Revisit starting a TRIAD group with AARP volunteer support; Engage statewide task force that is focusing on developing community-based comprehensive networks to address senior safety issues
10.2	\$0	0	6	1	AARP starting new statewide initiative to increase TRIADS EC tech. asst. provided for siren proposals-8 total; Homeland Security training; EC faci.2 mtgs between USDA & small city Rescue; Grant for a Township hall/comm. ctr/evac. site; Fire Prev. grant (smoke detectors for Group Work Camp); Another Township Hall sanitary/water grant	
23	\$0	8	20	3		Continue to support county's emergency services by identifying and defining EC role as opportunities arise

Table B1 (cont'd)

QOL—Improved Quality of Life

Benchmark #	Q Intermediate Plan (3-5 Years)	R Long Term Vision (Beyond EC Designation)
1.1	Make comprehensive master plan a living document that is reviewed and revised as necessary at regular intervals (2 years?)	MCEC will assist County in hiring professional planner and in establishing/operating countywide Planning Department
2.1	Investigate feasibility of creating and operating full-time recycling program and/or center; Investigate ways to fund the enforcement of blight ordinances	Recycling will reduce solid waste going to landfill by 50 %by operating full-scale recycling center
4.1	Support evaluation of Character Counts! program--not only with national evaluation measures but also with local evaluation analysis; Use those evaluation results to adapt program as indicated	
5.1	Reduce MCEC and County support for Parks & Recreation Department by encouraging countywide millage vote Investigate methods and facilitate the process of increasing local artist participation on the Art Council; Assist with planning/promotion of additional cultural events as requested by Art Council	Art Council will operate as self-sustaining, non-profit organization with 501c3 status
7.1		
7.2		
8.1		
10.1		
10.2		

Table B2. Benchmark Summary of Economic Development of Midwestern County Enterprise Community Program

ED—Improved Economic Development

B Goal(s)	C Benchmark #	D Objective(s)	E 1998 \$ Request	F 1998 Partners L/R/S/F**	G Total EC Alloc./ Spent	H Output—Primary Project / Program To Date	I Current All Partners L/R/S/F**	J Total \$ Rec. (not inc. EC)
Encourage economic development by: Creating jobs Diversifying the economy & Lowering unemployment	11.1	Expand/develop industrial park & infrastructure in a Small City B	\$1,650,000	2/0/2/0	\$20,000 / \$0	Midwestern County airport expanded, purchased new 16-acre industrial site	1/0/1/3	\$1,075,000
	11.2	Expand/develop industrial park & infrastructure in a Small City	\$1,250,000	2/0/1/1	\$20,000 / \$0	Water/sewer updates & expansion, new fire facility & equipment	2/0/0/1	\$12,374,650
	11.3	Expand/develop industrial park & infrastructure in Small City C	\$911,000	2/0/1/1	\$20,000 / \$20,000	Industrial park property purchased; infrastructure developed; grant/loan for sewer upgrade (4/04)	2/0/1/2	\$3,763, 250
	11.5	Develop/support a countywide economic development org.; Dev. tools to assist community development initiatives	\$75,000	8/1/0/1	\$113,000 / \$113,000	Local economic dev. corporation retained as county economic dev.org.	10/2/0/0	\$310,000
						Gap analysis study; 13-county regional plan created to improve availability, cost/quantity of advance Internet for all residents; Supported technology related grant proposals from libraries	6/14/4/0	\$376,178
Address informational barriers	22	Eliminate informational access disparities in county	BM est.2002	0/0/0/0	\$50,000 / \$127	Leadership Institute in Small City, Fall 2003	3/1/0/0	\$0
Enhance community leadership	24	Train more people to participate in community dev./volunteer activities	BM est.2003	0/0/0/0	\$5000 / \$1100			
Increase small farm profitability & preserve agricultural enterprises	12.2	Preserve family farms/ Create more agriculture jobs	\$228,000	4/0/0/1	\$20,000 / \$20,000	Farmers' market feasibility plan created; Built market (Summer 2003); Sustainability plan created	2/0/4/3	\$182,975
Attract and retain small businesses	13.1	Increase support for start-up and existing small businesses	\$452,000	6/4/1/2	\$40,000 / \$0	Joined local Chambers and facilitated discussion to explore ways to increase collaboration; Investigated partners to support development of a 1-stop capital shop with revolving loans	0/1/0/1	\$0
Address barriers to county residents obtaining & retaining jobs	13.2	Remove employee transportation obstacles	\$437,000	3/3/0/1	\$20,000 / \$20,000	Created/operated automotive repair facility to assist low-income individuals to obtain/maintain jobs	3/2/1/4	\$348,371
	13.3	Expand child care services with senior interaction	\$72,000	2/5/0/0	\$5,000 (from 16.3)/ \$0	None	0/0/0/0	\$0
	13.6	Expand empowerment & peer-managed job training opportunities	\$0 (yr. 3)	2/0/0/0	\$1,000 / \$0	Promote empowerment, build skills and provide job training (off/for local human service agency patrons)	1/0/0/0	\$0

**Partner Categories – Local / Regional / State / Federal

Table B2 (cont'd)

ED—Improved Economic Development

Benchmark #	K In-Kind \$	L ECBD Disc.	M Bchmrk Score	N Quadrant	O Comments	P Short Term Plan (1-2 Years)
11.1	\$0	3	19	3	EC participation waiting for USDA-RD required environmental study; EC designation aided a small city airport award of \$75,000 grant instead of requested loan of same amount.	Assist (local economic development corp.) to develop industrial park as requested; Utilize allocated money for ind. park infrastructure development when envir. study completed
11.2	\$0	5	17	2	USDA Community Facilities grants/loans used for water/sewer upgrade and expansion; New fire department facility and equipment	Assist Small City economic dev. corp. locate/purchase/develop (as requested) additional land for industrial expansion/development
11.3	\$0	3	21	3	Small City C established a LDFA and Chamber of Commerce, received Renaissance Zone status for industrial park, that site is promoted on state agency economic dev. Web site MCEC/Midwestern County maintains strong presence on (local economic development corp.) Board & Client Council; Partnership Council est. for Midwestern County partners; Original agreement called for regional economic development promotion, not by county; (Local economic development corp.) instrumental in County's Renaissance Zone designation, an adjacent county Smart Zone, and Brownfield Redevel. plan; Involved with Character Counts! and Business Ethics programs; Facilitated focus group meetings in a Small City that led to start of DDA development and Cool Cities program interest; another small city with CDBG application and townships with PA198 process	Continue to market Small City C industrial park (with its Ren. Zone designation) as requested
11.5	\$0	9	31	4		Work with a university to develop GIS maps for County and utilize those maps for various community development initiatives; Continue present level of financial/management support of a local economic dev. corp.
22	\$5,000	30	29	4	LinkMI plan led to NSF grant proposal for GIS mapping	Investigate funding sources to implement LinkMI plan with other partners; Create and submit proposals per results of that investigation
24	\$500	4	22	3	Leadership Institute created after (local economic dev. corp.) needs assessment in a Small City; First 12 members will graduate in Summer 2004	Expand Small City Leadership Institute to countywide program; Investigate cost and time table of asset identification study of area's seniors
12.2	\$15,350	32	30	4	Farmers' market is a 501c3 non-profit organization; Collaboration with Amish community was critical to start-up and continued operation of the market	Continue present level of support for operation of farmers market; Investigate potential funding sources to hire full time market director
13.1	\$0	3	11	2	(Local economic dev. corp.) sponsors Small Business Dev. Center and a technology center at local community college; Small Business Initiative needed that may require regional approach	Encourage all Chambers organizations to explore collaboration; Investigate opportunities to start/operate regional Small Business Initiative; Explore funding sources for that initiative
13.2	\$16,000	4	23	3	Operation out of business 12/03; New legislation increasing credit to those donating cars may assist; EC helped (local human service agency) develop business plan w/o car repair operation	Revisit automotive repair program using scaled-down operation (repair only); Facilitate disc. w/ other org. successfully running similar programs
13.3	\$0	0	2	1	Needs feasibility study; Funding for child and adult care is available; may need to look at regional approach	
13.6	\$0	0	7	1		Support development of local human service agency auto repair job training once operation described in 13.2 short-term plan is successful

Table B2 (cont'd)

ED—Improved Economic Development

Benchmark #	(Q) Intermediate Plan (3-5 Years)	(R) Long Term Vision (Beyond EC Designation)
11.1		
11.2		
11.3		
	Investigate alternative methods of MCEC program financial and management support of local econ.dev.corp.; Train local community development/planning/ other interested staff in accessing and utilizing GIS mapping techniques developed through National Science Foundation grant	
11.5		
22		
	Create evaluation of Leadership Institute program and use results to adapt program as needed; Recruit seniors to volunteer for community service based upon the asset identification project findings	More residents will volunteer to assist community development and human service organizations on a regular basis
24		
12.2	Continue financial support of farmers market; Assist operation as it moves to Midwestern Airport	
13.1		
13.2		
13.3		
13.6		

Table B3. Benchmark Summary of Midwestern County Enterprise Community Program Self Sufficiency

FSS - Improved Self Sufficiency / Strengthen Families & Human Services

B Goals	C Benchmark #	D Objective(s)	E 1998 \$ Request	F 1998 Partners L/R/S/F**	G Total EC Alloc/Spent
Improve emergency services	14.1	Develop/operate a local domestic violence shelter; Develop/operate emergency shelter	\$403,000	3/2/0/0	\$39,000 / \$20,500
	14.2	Increase 911 access for all citizens	\$14,000	1/1/1/0	\$0 / \$0
Improve social services through: Increased self-sufficiency Family preservation Improved family life	15.1	Increase incentives for developing good work habits	\$91,500	3/0/0/1	\$0 / \$0
	16.1	Expand peer-managed family enrichment teams Increase resident access to and awareness of countywide human service provider network	\$164,000	1/0/0/0	\$0 / \$0
Support to avoid out of home care	16.2		\$189,000	1/3/0/0	\$10,000 / \$0
Increase access to social services	17.1	Develop a common application for all human service providers	\$0 (yr.3)	2/0/0/0	\$500 / \$0
Provide decent, affordable, and safe housing to all county residents	18.1	Establish a low interest, short-term housing loan fund	\$174,000	1/1/0/0	\$15,000/\$10,000
	18.2	Establish a housing non-profit organization	\$840,000	2/0/1/1	\$11,500 / \$0
	18.3	Provide assistance for low-income, in-home conversions, rehab.	\$456,300	2/1/1/1	\$4305 / \$4305
	18.4	Create a housing clean-up, paint-up program	\$161,500	3/1/1/0	\$25,500/ \$5000
	18.5	Create/enforce a countywide rental code; Address other rental housing issues	\$95,000	3/1/1/0	\$5000 (from 18.6) / \$0
	18.7	Create a housing education/advocacy position	\$42,000	2/1/1/0	\$143,619 / \$116,572
	18.8	Increase availability of emergency services for the county's homeless population	\$112,000	2/2/1/0	\$3,000 / \$0
	18.9	Provide infrastructure to build new homes	\$660,000	2/0/1/0	\$0 / \$0
	18.10	Create an assisted-living center for seniors	\$0 yr.3	0/2/1/2	\$17,500 / \$0
	19.1	Design/construct a vocational training & business center for PK-14; Support QZAB loan application to USDA for school renovation	\$5,245,000	3/2/0/0	\$12,500 / \$0
Increase access to affordable health care	20.1	Purchase a van to transport low-income fam. to medical appts.	\$0 - yr.3	0/1/0/0	\$0 / \$0
	20.2	Develop/construct a satellite office for a health park	\$0 - yr.3	0/2/0/0	\$0 / \$0
	20.4	Provide rural area health access w/ mobile health care unit	\$196,000	1/1/0/0	\$5,000 / \$0
	20.3	Develop/expand home health care services	\$0 - yr.3	0/3/0/0	\$8950 / \$0
EC administration	21	Provide mechanism to pay administrative expenses for EC	NA	0/0/0/0	\$400,773 / \$303,087

**Partner Categories – Local / Regional / State / Federal

Table B3. (cont'd)

FSS - Improved Self Sufficiency / Strengthen Families & Human Services

Benchmark #	H Output—Primary Project/Program	I Current All Partners L/R/S/F**	J Total \$ Rec. (not inc EC)	K In-Kind \$	L ECBD Disc	M Benchmark Score	N Quadrant
14.1	Plan developed, site secured/renovated, Midwestern County domestic violence shelter (Shelter House) opened in 2000/continues to operate	5/1/1/1	\$129,622	\$10,896	12	35	4
14.2	None	0/0/0/0	\$0	\$0	0	2	1
15.1	None	0/0/0/0			0	1	1
16.1	None	0/0/0/0	\$0	\$0	0	2	1
16.2	Created and distributed county-wide resource directory to service providers	2/1/0/0	\$6,000	\$3000	6	22	3
17.1	Developed common application for all DASH Team providers	3/1/1/0	\$0	\$20	0	13	2
18.1	Facilitated partner meetings with goal of establishing low-interest revolving loan fund to provide financial counseling/mortgage assistance to low income families	3/0/1/0	\$1,500	\$0	0	12	2
18.2	Investigated legal structure and organizational capacity available for the creation of a community development corporation (CDC or CHDO)	3/1/0/0	\$0	\$0	0	7	1
18.3	Provide low income home rehab. assistance; Acquired/operate transition house	6/1/2/1	\$1,247,467	\$31,500	8	28	4
18.4	Clean-up/paint-up project scheduled for Summer 2004	6/3/1/2	\$20,000	\$2,589	11	29	4
18.5	Facilitated creation of rental unit waiting list to increase section 8 voucher usage in county	1/0/1/0	\$0	\$3,000	0	6	1
18.7	Housing educator/advocacy position created and filled	2/0/1/1	\$40,500	\$17,000	13	23	3
18.8	Continuum of Care plan created; Established homeless prevention endowment thru Midwestern County foundation	3/2/1/0	\$75,500	\$0	19	27	3
18.9	None	0/0/0/0	\$0	\$0	0	10	2
18.10	Created two proposals to fund feasibility study for possible senior center	1/0/0/0	\$0	\$0	8	10	2
19.1	None	0/1/0/1	\$2,760,000	\$0	1	9	1
20.1	None	0/0/0/0	\$0	\$0	0	2	1
20.2	None	0/0/0/0	\$0	\$0	0	1	1
20.4	None	0/1/1/0	\$0	\$0	1	5	1
20.3	Supported visiting nurses agency's monitor proposal; Agreed to provide funding for one monitor	0/0/1/0	\$0	\$0	2	11	2
21	Payment of EC administrative expenses (director, consultant)	NA	NA	NA			na

**Partner Categories – Local / Regional / State / Federal

Table B3. (cont'd)

FSS - Improved Self Sufficiency				
O		P	Q	R
Benchmark #	Comments	Short Term Plan (1-2 Years)	Intermediate Plan (3-5 Years)	Long Term Vision (Beyond EC Designation)
14.1	As of 9/02, 53 persons sheltered, 4 counseled for sexual assault, 137 received legal advice, 50 rape victims served and 278 youth received Prevention Education; Shelter House has 20-year mortg.	Develop sustainable plan for Shelter House via fund raising efforts and identifying alternative funding sources	Evaluate and adapt short term sustainable plan as required to anticipate elimination of EC support	Shelter House operates independently, expands services, pays off mortgage
14.2				
15.1	MCEC money will be used to produce and distribute Resource Directory to residents; United Way bulk permit used	Support update of Resource Directory and distribution to all Clare County residents; Encourage posting/updating of Directory onto Internet	Support dev./implementation/ update of countywide 211 system	
16.1				
16.2	DASH developed common application in Fall 2004 and now utilizes			
17.1				
18.1	\$10,000 EC funds used for housing study Local comm. action agency named CHDO (2003) / Lots of proposal activity on this benchmark, but no resulting grants.			
18.2				
18.3	USDA donated transitional house, All housing \$ in this category, USDA report Fall 2003		Continue to support operation of transitional house Based upon evaluation of first Group Work Camp, schedule another program	
18.4	\$20,000 from Group Work Camp Inc payable 7/04	Hold Group Work Camp in Summer 2004 Locate/visit comparable communities that have faced similar conditions regarding lack of rental codes		
18.5		Continue to support and expand housing advocacy position; Support expansion of DASH Team as members increase collaboration levels to take primary role in directing countywide housing services		
18.7		Continue to support efforts of Continuum of Care as requested; Add to homeless endowment to increase # of emergency bed nights		
18.8		Develop Mutual Self Help pre-application with DASH Team members; Investigate funding alternatives to purchase land	Support DASH Team dev. of proposal to develop eight houses over two years	
18.9	Mutual Self Help meeting April 2004	MCEC fund feasibility study?		
18.10				
19.1				
20.1				
20.2				
20.4		Promote availability of a local university regional health survey from Spring/04		
20.3	MCEC provided letter of support for local health provider 4/04; proposal for rural monitors from USDA DLT Telehealth program			
21				

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

BENCHMARK _____

Benchmark Ranking System Midwestern County EC Program

Each of the EC program benchmarks have been assigned a cumulative total score derived by summing the various activities specifically associated with that benchmark. Most activities received a value of one (1) point—except where noted.

Points / Activity

- ____ Benchmark leader named
- ____ Benchmark leader active
- ____ 1-5 EC Board discussions
- ____ 6-10 EC Board discussions
- ____ 10 or more EC Board discussions
- ____ EC money allocated
- ____ 1-49% EC money spent
- ____ 50% or more EC money spent
- ____ Investigated potential partners or project
- ____ Facilitated activity (support letter, brainstorm session, etc) (1 point=low, 2=medium, 3=high activity level)
- ____ Sub-contracted service
- ____ Feasibility/marketing/other plan created (1 point per study or plan)
- ____ Organizational meeting held
- ____ EC program staff served on Advisory/Policy Board
- ____ Committee/team formed & meets 1-4 times
- ____ **TOTAL BENCHMARK POINTS**

Point(s) / Activity

- ____ 1 funding proposal written
- ____ 2-3 funding proposals written
- ____ 4 or more funding proposals written
- ____ 1 grant received
- ____ 2-3 grants received
- ____ 4 or more grants received
- ____ In-kind received
- ____ 1-5 **local** partners (funding or in-kind)
- ____ 6 or more local partners
- ____ 1-5 **regional** partners
- ____ 6 or more regional partners
- ____ 1-5 **state** partners
- ____ 6 or more state partners
- ____ 1-5 **federal** partners
- ____ 6 or more federal partners
- ____ Short term strategic plan identified
- ____ Short term strategic plan created
- ____ Short term plan implemented
- ____ Short term evaluation plan created
- ____ Intermediate term plan identified
- ____ Intermediate strategic plan created
- ____ Intermediate plan implemented (beyond current programming)
- ____ Intermediate evaluation plan created
- ____ Long term plan identified
- ____ Long term strategic plan created
- ____ Long term plan implemented (beyond current programming)
- ____ Long term evaluation plan created
- ____ Other _____

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D - Table D1. MCEC Program Progress Team – Benchmark Asset/Barrier Summary

Improved Quality of Life (QOL)					
Target	Goal(s)	Bench mark #	Objective(s)	Bench-mark Score	Assets / Barriers
Physical Atmosphere	Improve countywide comprehensive land use planning	1.1	Create/implement a coordinated land use plan	27	Assets: Comp. plan is done and distributed for comment / Barrier: 90 days from completion
	Improve use of natural resources	2.1	Establish recycling programs; Establish countywide blight ordinance	31	Assets: Hired recycling coordinator; 14 of 16 passed blight ord. created Barriers: No recycling program; no blight enforcement money
Community Behavior	Improve cultural sensitivity; Promote ethics and character education for adults and children	4.1	Develop/operate cultural sensitive education program; Support ethics & substance abuse alternative education	25	Asset: Character Counts has reached close to targeted number of students Barrier: Lack of participation
Culture/ Leisure/ Recreation	Improve recreational opportunities for all residents	5.1	Establish/operate a comprehensive recreation plan and department	30	Asset: Rec. plan is complete Barrier: \$ to implement plan and pay for rec. director
	Increase community art/cultural events	6.1	Create/operate a countywide arts council	29	Asset: Art Council is started Barrier: Continued volunteer participation on Art Council

Table D1 (cont.) QOL

Infrastructure	Improve infrastructure	7.1	Improve roads by developing brine well	1	Asset/Barrier: Project found support outside of EC
		7.2	Build a tunnel for safer Amish travel	1	Asset: MDOT widened bridge w/o EC support /Barrier: No time
	Improve public transportation	8.1	Provide 24/7 transit service	2	Asset: Transit did get grant to expand hours w/o EC involvement Barrier: Ridership did not support continued extended hours
Seniors	Better utilize senior talents; Increase intergenerational activities	10.1	Establish/operate a countywide volunteer center	20	Asset: Volunteer Center is open and running Barrier: Lack volunteer staff
	Improve network that addresses senior safety issues	10.2	Start/operate a TRIAD	6	Assets: Officers were trained Barrier: Funding cutbacks led to staff sheriff staff reduction, \$ not available to run program
Resident Safety	Address community safety issues	23	Improve system that ensures safety of residents by supporting disaster preparedness activities	20	Asset: Sirens system was improved Barrier: \$

Table D1 (cont'd)

Economic Development (ED)					
Goals	BM	Objective(s)	BM Score	Assets / Barriers	
Encourage economic development Creating jobs	11.1	Expand/develop industrial park & infrastructure in Midwestern City	19	Asset: In progress	
Diversifying the economy Lowering unemployment	11.2	Locate industrial park & build infrastructure in Small City A	17	Asset: Done infrastructure Barrier: No industrial park in Small City A	
	11.3	Expand/develop industrial park & infrastructure in Small City B	21	Asset: Infrastructure done on park	
	11.5	Develop/support a county-wide economic development organization	31	Asset: Contracted local economic devel. org./Barrier: Not located in county	
Address Informational Barriers	22	Eliminate informational access disparities in county	29	Asset: LinkMI state plan created Barrier: Still needs to happen	
Enhance Community Leadership	24	Train more people to participate in community dev./volunteer activities	22	Asset: Started Leadership Institute; Offered Citizen Planner scholarships Barrier: Ongoing expansion	
Increase Small Farm Profitability & Preserve Agricultural Enterprises	12.2	Preserve family farms; Create more agriculture jobs	30	Asset: Farmers' Market developed Barrier: Open space, farm and place considerations	
Attract and Retain Small Businesses	13.1	Increase support for start-up and existing small businesses	11	Assets: Small Business Dev. Center at community college	
Address Barriers to Residents Obtaining/ Retaining Jobs	13.2	Remove employee transportation obstacles	23	Needs more resources to develop program	
	13.3	Expand child care services with senior interaction	2	Needs more resources to develop program	
	13.6	Expand peer- managed job training	7	Barrier: Needs more work	

Improved Self Sufficiency / Strengthen Families & Human Services					
Goals	BM	Objective(s)	Benchmk Score	Assets / Barriers	
Improve Emergency Services	14.1	Develop/operate a local domestic violence shelter; Develop/operate emergency shelter	35	Asset: Center is open/ oper. Barrier: \$, future staff & volunteers needed	
	14.2	Increase 911 access for all citizens	2	No action	
Improve social services through: Increased self-sufficiency	15.1	Increase incentives for developing good work habits	1	No action	
Family preservation Improved family life	16.1	Expand peer- managed family enrichment teams	2	No action	
Support to avoid out-of home care	16.2	Increase resident access/awareness of countywide human service provider network.	22	Asset: Res. Dir. created Barrier: All system ???	
Increase Access to Social Services	17.1	Develop a common application for all human service providers	13	Asset: DASH Team has completed/Barrier: All service providers are still not using common app.	
Provide Decent, Affordable, Safe Housing	18.1	Establish a low interest, short-term housing loan fund	12	Asset: Leader named and progress made Barrier: Progress slow	
	18.2	Establish a housing non-profit org.	7	Asset: Expanded priority non-profit still needed Barrier: ??	
	18.3	Provide assistance for low- income, in-home conversions, rehab.	28	Assets: Lot of progress- Coalition created/ Barriers: Poor financial condition of residents	
	18.4	Create a housing clean-up, paint-up program	29	Asset: Group work will be held this summer Barrier: Another coming in 2006 (?)	

Table D1. (cont'd) FSS

	18.5	Create/enforce a countywide rental code; Address other rental housing issues	6	Asset: Code didn't happen but other rental issues addressed/ Barrier: Code creation needs work and support
	18.7	Create a housing education/advocacy position	23	Asset: Counselor hired / Barrier: ???
	18.8	Increase availability of emergency services for the county's homeless population	27	Asset: Continuum of Care program brings \$70,000 On going / Barrier: ???
	18.9	Provide infrastructure to build new homes	10	Asset: Studying Mutual Self Help program Barrier: Needs to happen
	18.10	Create an assisted-living center for seniors	10	Asset: Working to get feasibility study done Barrier: \$
Increase Availability of Vocational Training & Support upgrades of county schools' Infrastructure	19.1	Design/construct a vocational training/business center for PK-14; Support school infrastructure improvement	9	Asset: technology center, USDA grants/ Barrier: ???
Increase Access to Affordable Health Care	20.1	Purchase a van to transport low-income families to medical appointments	2	No action
	20.2	Develop/construct a satellite office for Mid-MI Health Park	1	No action
	20.4	Provide rural area health access with mobile health care unit	5	No action
	20.3	Develop/expand home health care	11	Asset: Recently submitted a telemedicine proposal for rural health monitors/ Barriers: lots of competition for those funds

APPENDIX D

Table D2. 1970s Progress Team Futuring Session
(5/18/04)

1970s

World

- Gas shortage
- Impeach Nixon
- President Gerald Ford
- Leisure suits
- Vietnam War
- Home computer P/C
- VCR-(Beta vs. VHS)
- Drug culture
- Free love
- Back to the land
- Health food
- Economic Recession
- Electric typewriter

Midwestern County

- Mardi Gras festival
- New sheriff
- A Midwestern City high school built
- Major highway dedicated
- 1st arts council formed

Songs

- Bridge Over Troubled Water
- Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young
- Disco Duck

APPENDIX D

Table D3. 1980s Progress Team Futuring Session
(5/18/04)

1980s

World

- Gas shortage
- Lower population growth
- Challenger
- Mt St. Helens
- Home computers
- Cable TV/Dish
- CNN
- Internet
- Cell phones

Midwestern County

- A Small City B
family murder
- Out-of-home
care kids
- Judge XXXXX
- A new store
- Transit
- Hamburger Hill
- Cable
- Local murder
case
(sheriff)

Songs

- Bee Gee's –
- Stayin' Alive
- Rocky Mountain
High
- Boston

APPENDIX D

Table D4. 1990s Futuring Session
(5/18/04)

1990s

World

- Gulf War
- Communication explosion
- Stock market
- Generation X
- DVD's/CD's
- Proposal A
- Digital Camera
- Fiberoptic & Broadband
- Websites

Inventions

- George Foreman grill
- Smoothie maker
- Bread makers
- Electric breast pumps
- Computerized milking parlor

Midwestern County

- Landfill
- MCEC planning
- Local hotel expansion
- Jail expansion
- Local human service agency created
- Engler (governor)
- New technology center opens 2000
- Sheriff XXXX
- A local restaurant opens
- Local community college fall festival starts
- New Business and Professional Women Association formed

Songs

- Macarena
- Back Street Boys
- N-sync
- Friends in Low Places – Garth Brooks

APPENDIX D

Table D5. Progress Team Trend Analysis
(5/18/04)

2004

World

- Iraq & terrorism
 - What is long-term cost
+ changing psychology
of business
- Health care costs
- Baby boomers
- Drugs
- Outsourcing—jobs & employers
- Service industry
- Shortage
- Scarce public resources

Trends

- Fuel costs up
- Transportation costs up
- Inflation increasing
- Defense material spending on
rise
- Healthier lifestyle
- Self insurance
- Chamber insurance (pooling)
helps small business
- Outsourcing—boomerang effect
- Midwestern County offers
transportation system advantage
- High tech education available in
county
- WVFI (wireless technology)

APPENDIX D

Table D6. Progress Team SWOT Analysis of Midwestern County

WEAKNESSES:	Current or Possible Benchmarks	Comments
<i>MAJOR – Persistent Poverty</i>	Most of the economic development and family self-sufficiency benchmarks have components that address poverty issues.	Key question: Are Midwestern County's low-income families better off because of the EC program since 1998?
➤ Losing young people	5.1-rec.plan, 6.1-arts council & cultural events, 11.5-support econ. dev., 19.1-vo-tech	—
➤ Lack of entertainment choices and activities for kids	5.1-recreation plan 6.1-arts council & cultural events	Are we losing young people primarily because of lack of entertainment choices? What are other issues-job opportunities, recreation, cultural events?
➤ Lack of good paying jobs	11.1, 11.2, 11.3-infrastructure dev. for several small cities, 11.5-support MMDC, 13.1-sm. bus. initiative, 13.6-job training, 15.1-incentives for good work habits, 19.1-voc.tech, 22-internet access	Critical area —need to consider all economic development effort on one side (attracting new business and industry + providing infrastructure), while also upgrading worker job skills to meet perceived demand on the other.
➤ Lack of large industry	11.1-11.3-infrastructure and industrial park expansion in several cities, 11.5-support local econ. dev. corp., 22-informational tech., Worker job training also critical and employer perceived quality of life for Midwestern County area.	Need comprehensive economic development strategy: attract large industry, retain/grow existing firms, and assist small business start-ups. New employers also look at community's culture, recreational opportunities, quality of education, etc.

Table D6 (cont.) WEAKNESSES (continued):		Current or Possible Benchmarks	Comments
➤ Increase in illiteracy		13.1-entrepreneurial education in schools, 19.1-voc.tech. education	No benchmark directly addressed this issue.
➤ Lack of affordable housing-single family units		Most of the housing related benchmarks (18.?)	Involves building new homes and rehabbing existing ones; also creation and enforcement of rental codes, and; assistance for low-income families (revolving loan, down payment assistance, and mortgage rate)
➤ More retirees than young families		Senior issues specifically identified in: 10.1 (intergenerational activities), 10.2 (safety) and 18.10 (assisted living centers), but many other benchmarks also impact seniors.	Need to identify assets of retiree group and invite those interested to volunteer and help out with community development activities.
➤ Lack of retail choices		11.5-support local econ.dev. corp. 12.2-value-added ag., 13.1- small business initiative	
➤ Lack of professional services		20.2-satellite office for XXXX Health Park	Many other benchmark's would impact this issue, e.q., housing availability, retail, cultural evants, education quality, and recreational opportunities
➤ Lack of medical services		20.1-20.4 access to affordable health care	Refocus these benchmarks? All deal with health care issues--only 20.4 has short term plan in place.
➤ Lack of senior assisted housing		18.10-sr.assisted living centers	Problems getting feasibility study funded.
➤ Lack of public transportation (but many counties have none)		8.1-24/7 transit service	Change focus of this benchmark?

Table D6 (cont.) STRENGTHS:	Current or Possible Benchmarks	Comments
MAJOR – Grassroots cooperation – government/ agencies practice good, broad-based communication		This is what the EC is all about- collaboration and following a comprehensive approach to community development.
➤ Strong chambers	13.1-small business initiative	Work just beginning to foster more collaboration with the three chambers in county.
➤ EC program- economic development effort in general	All economic development benchmarks	
➤ Natural resources	1.1-comp.master plan, 5.1-rec.plan and department	Primary attribute to area that impacts most benchmarks in one way or the other.
➤ Central location	1.1-comprehensive master plan, 11.1-11.3-industrial infrastructure development, 11.5-support local economic development corp., 13.1-small business initiative	Central location gives residents more choice for education/healthcare decisions; impacts business operations, and recreation/tourism development, puts pressure on level/quality of comm. Services.
➤ Interstate highway system	5.1-rec plan/department, 8.1-transit service, 11.1-11.3-industrial infrastructure development, 11.5-support MMDC	
➤ Adult education/training	13.1-small business assistance and training, 19.1-voc-tech.	Job training to meet the requirements of new and existing employers is another critical area for community development focus. The County is poised to respond with many providers providing services in this area.

Table D6 (cont.) STRENGTHS (continued)	Current or Possible Benchmarks	Comments
➤ Churches ➤ play major role	???	Also listed as threat?? No MCEC benchmark specifically works with faith-based community.
➤ Amish community	7.2-Amish tunnel, 12.2-Gateway farm market	--
➤ Good city services/infrastructure	11.1-11.3 Infrastructure development in several cities, 11.5-support local economic development corporation	--

THREATS:	Current or Possible Benchmarks	Comments
MAJOR: <i>High school non-graduates</i> <i>High teenage pregnancy rates</i> <i>High teen suicide rate</i> <i>High child poverty rate</i>		Should we have a greater specific program focus on the poor outcomes for the area's children?
➤ Need more consistent approach to develop/enhance youth services	???	--
➤ Faith/churches	???	Also listed as a strength??
➤ Need more family role models parents & leaders in community	4.1-Character Counts!, 10.1-volunteer center, 16.1-peer managed family enrichment teams, 24-community leadership training	--
➤ Need to attract/grow more families (young)	1.1-comprehensive master plan, 5.1-rec.plan and department, 6.1-arts council, 19.1-school upgrades	---

Table D6 (cont.) THREATS (continued)		Current or Possible Benchmarks	Comments
➤ Need more good paying jobs		Most economic development benchmarks target this goal including: 13.6-peer managed job training, 13.1-small business development,	--
➤ Increase in only low paying jobs		13.2-remove transportation obstacles + 19.1-voc.tech. training	
➤ Citizen leadership-need more participation and caring people		16.1-family enrichment teams, 10.1-volunteer center, 24-community leadership training,	Need to know what assets seniors and other residents have and purposefully recruit them to participate in community development/volunteer activities.
➤ Lack of regulation		2.1-blight ordinances, 18.5-rental housing code	Both benchmarks have a slow, tough road to successful development and enforcement.
➤ Systemic public sector revenue problem (related to fed/state budget deficits)		?	?

Opportunities = The Future		Current or Possible Benchmarks	Comments
MAJOR: Population is increasing		1.1 comprehensive master plan provides map for growth	Not only that the county is growing at a rapid rate, but also that seniors represent the bulk of that increase.
➤ Mainly retirees/their wealth		Seniors issues are specifically addressed in 10.1-intergenerational activities, 10.2-safety, and 18.10 -assisted living, but 5.1 (rec. plan), 8.1 (transport.), 13.1 (small business dev.) and health benchmarks (20.1-4) also focus on this group.	In addition to needing an asset survey of area's seniors to expand the community's leadership base, information on this group's other issues and expectations would assist community development efforts as well.

Table D6 (continued) Opportunities (continued)	Current or Possible Benchmarks	Comments
➤ Second home people	18.2-new home building, 18.3-rehab. assistance, but this group must also put uneven demands upon the health care, recreational, business, and even education sectors.	Some studies claim that seasonal citizens are more likely to resist any sort of change in their absence. What do the 40% of Midwestern County's part time residents think of community development initiatives?
➤ Increased potential customer market on interstate	11.5-support the local economic development corp. 13.1-small business initiative,	--
➤ Small business/ entrepreneurial development-- may be in downtowns	11.5-support local economic development corp., 13.1-small business initiative,	Continue (a small city's) current effort to start a Downtown Development Association and also place emphasis on developing the regional Small Business Initiative (#13.1) with a local economic dev. corporation's assistance.
➤ Broad volunteer market	Many current benchmarks rely on volunteers to carry-out their programs-6.1-(arts council), 10.1 (volunteer center), 14.1 (Shelter House), 18.4 (Work Camp) and 18.8 (Continuum of Care) are a few examples.	While collaboration and volunteerism are widely practiced in the county, leadership training must continue to expand and new groups (especially seniors and youth) must be actively encouraged to participate in community planning activities.

APPENDIX D

Table D7. Progress Team Priority Recommendations

Benchmark	Tasks	Timeline	\$ Cost
Economic dev. 11.5	Participate...remain involved	Continuous	\$20,000 annual
Ind. Park Support, 11.1-3	Need property for Small City A Continue purchase & update Small Cities B & C, Need Broadband	Imminent Continuous Ready to go- Plan done	??
Expand Family Enrichment – 16.1	Identify benchmark leader/ Youth at risk program design – chair/mentoring/ connections/ kids/senior/Alt. Ed	June 2004 Sept. start 2004	\$10,000 conserv. Est. for needs assess.
Ethics & Character – 4.1	Need for additional mentor. Focused program & “?” models Sort through where mentoring belongs	June 2004	Continue present or expand (?) support
Recreation Development – 5.1	Write grant for personnel / Fund raise from local govts. Develop program / Market program / Educate public for a millage	Sept. 2004	No specific \$ amount recomm.
Small Business Initiative – 13.1	Engage economic dev. corp. Establish RLF Benchmarking, study for incubator / Engage local university	Dec. 2004 March 2005	\$20,000 \$40,000
Assisted Living 18.10	Get the study done / Identify benchmark leader Submit to USDA / Possibly attach to ER Clinic VA interest-per XXXXX	July 2004	\$10,000
Housing Advocacy – 18.7	-3/4 of participants in DASH Team / Need to continue-Possibly add credit counseling assistance to volunteer training / DASH take greater leadership /Need to create countywide housing strategic plan	Continuous	Continue or expand present level of support
20.4 ER Clinic Health Clinic	Identify next steps with local university study / Engage XXXXXXX / Need additional emergency care study / Investigate local university as Chair	June 2004	New area of support-no \$\$ amount recomm.
12.2 Kitchen Incubation Small Farm Dev.	Possible charge-Need to complete land agreement w/ City & Raise money Farmers' Market Final bus. & land use plan	May 2004	No specific \$ recomm.
Program Admin.	On-going Progress Team		Per Director recomm.
Other Progress Team recommendations from mid-term evaluation, but not part of Progress Team “TOP 10” list above & Senior Survey -for volunteering base & director succession			

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX E

Progress Team Evaluation Summary

July 20, 2004 – Nine respondents (out of 14).

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely agree), participants circled the number that best corresponded to their opinion regarding that statement.

- 1) The content (presentations and activities) of the *Progress Team* meetings matched my expectations made before attending those meetings.

AVERAGE: 4.22

COMMENTS:

- Benchmark summary sheets and data provided in the manual given exceeded my expectations.
- Didn't really know what to expect.
- I had made no expectations—I feel that is best.
- Was not expecting activities—liked them.

- 2) The goals of the *Progress Team* were clear—we knew what we were supposed to accomplish.

AVERAGE: 4.11

COMMENTS:

- Didn't seem clear for those who had no previous involvement with E.C.
- Helping the group get answers on what direction was the way to go.
- It was pretty clear to me. However, my perception may be different from the others. I would like to hear their responses.

- 3) The *Progress Team* was provided with enough information regarding the past and current operation of the EC to make informed recommendations regarding the program's future.

AVERAGE: 4.78

COMMENTS:

- The vast amount of information was compacted nicely to be able to move forward and expand ideas without dwelling on the past.
- I think we had plenty—but having it before hand could have helped to review and understand better.

- 4) The *Progress Team* accomplished its goals.

AVERAGE: 4.33

COMMENTS:

- We're never done—always room for improvement.
- I think we did—but time will tell.
- I feel we did a good job of looking at the needs of all Midwestern County groups (diverse) and economic levels, but feel we could have more participation from low income and single parent families.

Appendix E (cont.)

-Having small groups helped the whole "GROUP" decide what should be on the top of the list.

-I'm not sure –it seems like we processed a lot of information, but our outcomes didn't seem tangible.

- 5) I would be interested in serving on another *Progress Team* if this sort of work was sponsored by the EC on a yearly basis.

AVERAGE: 4.77

COMMENTS:

-Very informative and inspiring. A great opportunity to be part of this community.

-Yes, as long as it was all done in one day. If you do it yearly one day should be enough.

-Very helpful to the county.

-This is very important to stay on course.

- 6) Scale-- **1= not useful** - to- **5= very useful**, participants circled number that best indicated their opinion regarding the various components used during the *Progress Team* meetings:

-SWOT Analysis (5/18)	AVERAGE: 4.55
-EC Assets & Challenges Exercise (5/18)	AVERAGE: 4.55
-Futuring Session (1970-80-90 and current trends) (5/18)	AVERAGE: 3.80
-Revisit EC Vision Statement (5/26)	AVERAGE: 4.33
-Benchmark Summaries	AVERAGE: 4.44
-Notebook's Contents	AVERAGE: 4.77
-Past Practice Review & Emerging Issues	AVERAGE: 4.66
-Evaluation/Benchmark Summary Overview	AVERAGE: 4.33
-SWOT Analysis	AVERAGE: 4.22
-Trend Prioritizing (small groups-5/26)	AVERAGE: 4.33
-Benchmark Categories Comparison	AVERAGE: 4.44
-Next Steps Plan for Top 10 Priorities (5/26)	AVERAGE: 4.22
-Benchmark Ranking System	AVERAGE: 4.33

- 7) The best result of the *Progress Team* meetings was:

COMMENTS:

-Prioritizing benchmarks by examining the needs of the county.

-To realize how far the group has come and the re-focusing.

-Ranking the new benchmarks.

-Everyone worked together.

-Lunch and ice cream.

-Getting to know the participants.

-It was very helpful to refocus on the benchmarks and realize our current needs.

-Setting the course for the future.

Appendix E (cont.)

-Determining where we stand currently.

- 8) The most disappointing result of the meetings was:

COMMENTS:

- Futuring session-though interesting it took too much time-songs of the past, etc-not relevant.
- Too much time on the past, not enough time for the future.
- None.
- Too much in a short time.
- Needed more time.
- I couldn't attend the full session due to other meeting conflict.
- The diversity of the group and time spent ranking the top 10 priorities.
- Some participants lack of vision.
- Lunch

- 9) If future *Progress Teams* are sponsored, I would change the following:

COMMENTS:

- Give out survey at the end of each session.
- Get data out in advance—there was not time to review, consider, and process.
- Make it one day.
- Extended session.
- Send (MCEC director) to ????? for several days! (???? was not legible, but guess is that comment was of positive nature given other evaluation responses from that individual).
- Give more advance notice of time and date of sessions.
- The diversity of the group.
- Make it one full day.

APPENDIX F

APPENDIX F

Milestones Total Points Per Category

MILESTONE	Quality of Life- 11 total benchmarks	Economic Develop.- 11 total benchmarks	Family Self-Suff.- 20 total benchmarks
Benchmark leader named	8	10	13
Benchmark leader active	8	10	12
1-5 EC Board discussions	6	9	10
6-10 EC Board discussions	6	3	7
10 or more EC Board discussions	6	4	4
EC money allocated	9	11	14
1-49% EC money spent	5	5	5
50% or more EC money spent	3	4	3
Investigated potential partners or project	11	10	20
Facilitated activity (support letter, brainstorm session)	21	14	25
Sub-contracted service	3	7	2
Feasibility/marketing/other plan created	5	3	5
Organizational meeting held	7	5	11
EC program staff served on Advisory Board	7	10	6
Committee/team formed & meets 1-4 times	5	4	6
Committee/team formed & meets 5 or more	5	4	6
Funding proposals written / Grants received	18	34	27
In-kind received	5	4	8
1-5 local partners (funding or in-kind)	7	9	12
6 or more local partners	2	2	2
1-5 regional partners	4	5	9
6 or more regional partners	0	2	0
1-5 state partners	6	5	10
6 or more state partners	0	1	0
1-5 federal partners	2	6	6
6 or more federal partners	0	0	0
Short-term strategic plan identified	13	13	15
Short-term strategic plan created	8	9	11
Short-term plan implemented	5	4	3
Short-term evaluation plan created	0	0	0
Intermediate-term plan identified	5	3	5
Intermediate strategic plan created	1	1	1
Intermediate evaluation plan created	0	0	0
Long-term plan identified	0	0	0
Long-term strategic plan created	0	0	0
Other	1	5	1
TOTAL	192	216	259

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