

‘HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY SYSTEMS’

HORIZONS PROGRAM – IDAHO

The following document has been prepared for the Idaho Horizons Program. It aims to place the Horizons Program into the community systems framework that has been developed by Innovative Leadership Australia and partners (D. Beurle; C. Loden; P. Salant, 2006)

In addition, it summarizes the discussion and presentations made at meetings of community Steering Committee members, Coaches and various agency staff on 27 and 28 November, 2006

The Horizons Program, sponsored by the Northwest Area Foundation, is being delivered by the University of Idaho Extension Services to participating communities in northern Idaho.

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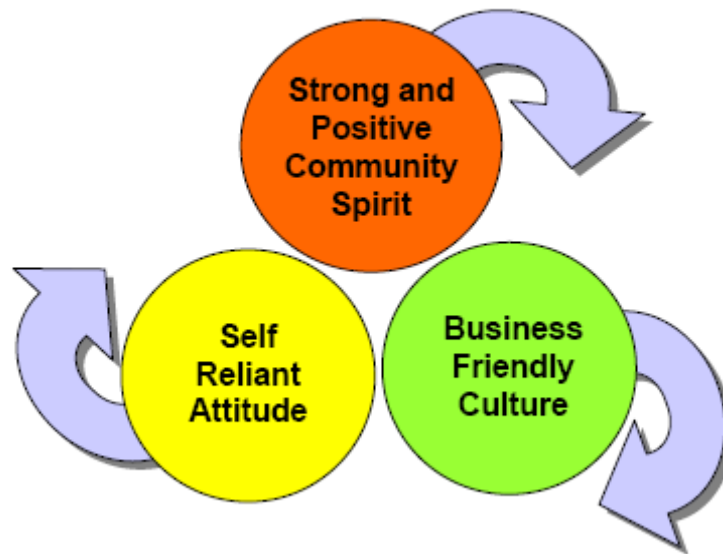
8th December 2006



WHAT DRIVES A COMMUNITY? – A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

- Communities are made up of 'organic' systems.
- Mobilizing a community requires that key systems operate dynamically. This reflects what people recognize as 'energy' and 'vibrancy'.
- Three critical macro systems which create momentum and drive successful communities:
 - Strong and Positive Community Spirit
 - Business Friendly Culture
 - Self Reliant Attitude
- These macro systems, when operating in a dynamic manner, reinforce each other and propel overall community momentum and vitality.

COMMUNITY DRIVERS - MACRO-SYSTEMS



The starting point in mobilizing communities is critical. Experience shows that kick-starting a community towards a new, more vibrant future starts with building a Strong and Positive Community Spirit, moves to creating a Business Friendly Culture and then to developing a Self Reliant Attitude. However, the process is organic, always moving, and iterative.

MACRO-SYSTEM – Building a Strong and Positive Community Spirit

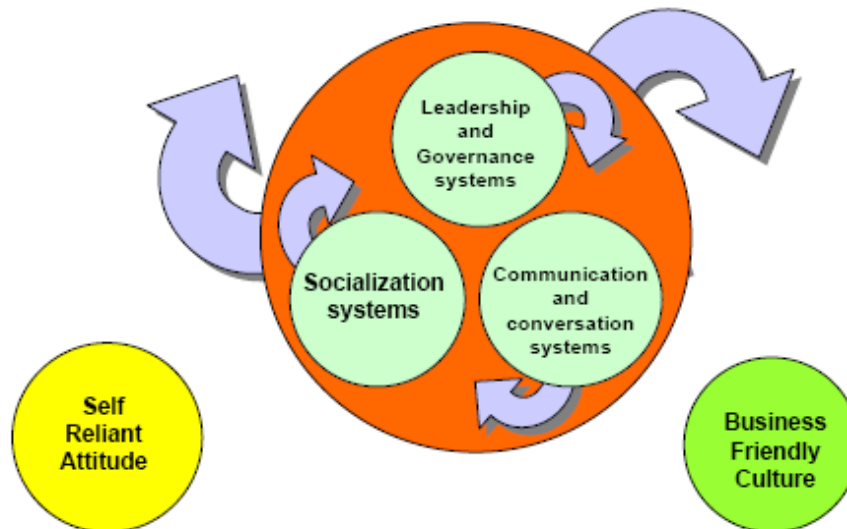
A **Strong and Positive Community Spirit** is made up of three critical sub-systems:

- Leadership and Governance
- Communication and conversation
- Socialization

Together they shape different aspects of the community:

- The prevailing context created by conversations taking place across the community. Collectively these conversations reflect how the community sees itself in terms of values, behavior and outlook on the future.
- The process by which community members interact to make collective decisions about issues that affect their future.
- The capacity for relationship building and inclusiveness across the community.

STRONG and POSITIVE COMMUNITY SPIRIT Sub-systems



Strategies that launch a strong and positive community spirit include:

- Community based leadership training
- Transition of power to new, dynamic and inspiring leaders
- Culture changing campaigns and projects
- Community capacity building programs and community building events

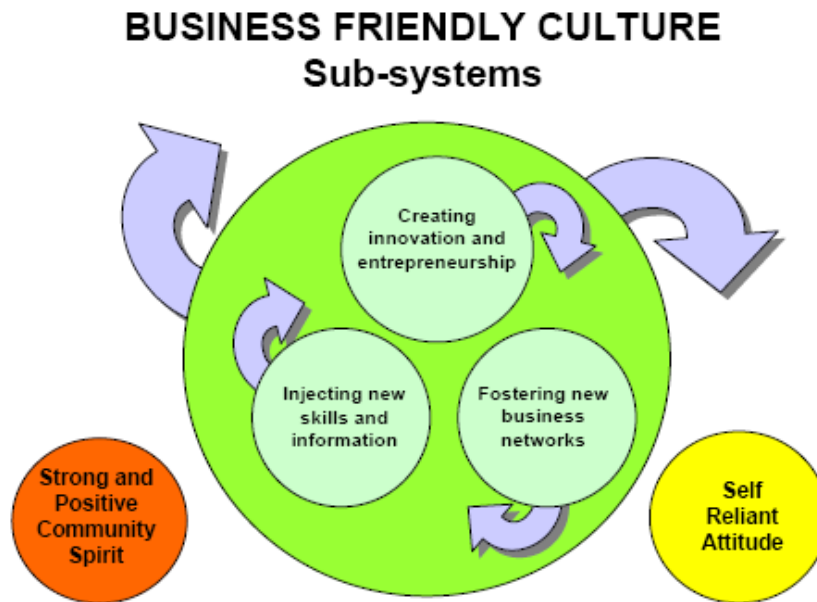
MACRO-SYSTEM – Creating a Business Friendly Culture

A **Business Friendly Culture** has three critical sub-systems. These are:

- Creating Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- Fostering new business networks
- Injecting new skills and information

Together they shape different aspects of the community:

- The business environment that is conducive to risk taking and entrepreneurial behavior. This is a key to future economic success in small communities because the vast majority of job growth is coming from small business expansions and entrepreneurial start-ups.
- The ability for a community to grow the collective 'economic pie'; and sharing the benefits of a stronger local economy
- The capacity to identify, explore and take advantage of new economic opportunities, often completely different from those that have been important in the past.



Strategies that kick-start a business friendly culture include:

- Entrepreneurial training programs
- Connecting the business community to the schools and fostering future entrepreneurs
- Sending delegations out to explore best practice and innovation; and bringing in leading edge thinkers to challenge the status quo on future economic directions
- Building networks of industry clusters and business clubs
- Appointing specialist people and programs on topics like downtown revitalization and economic development

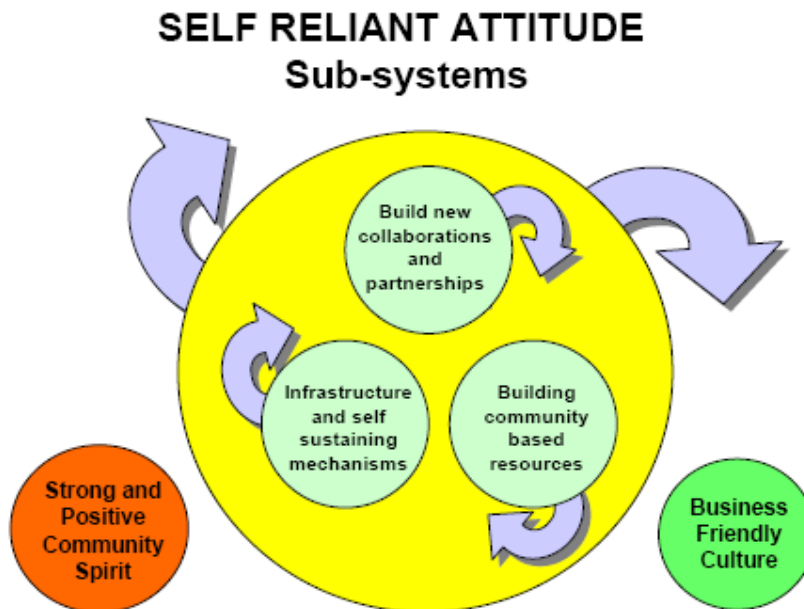
MACRO-SYSTEM – Stimulating a Self Reliant Attitude

A **Self Reliant Attitude** has three critical sub-systems. These are:

- Building new collaborations and partnerships
- Building community based resources
- Creating the infrastructure of self sustaining mechanisms

Together they shape different dimensions of the community:

- The capacity to build innovative partnerships and collaborations, both within and outside the community. These partnerships allow groups and communities to build on each other's strengths, pool and share resources, and work together on projects larger than any one group can handle.
- The capacity for the community to attract and utilize outside resources and opportunities
- The ability to 'self-fund' projects and initiatives and to operate over the long term towards a common goal.
- The ability to maintain momentum and avoid 'burn-out'
- Build sustainability, endurance and reliance in the community, at a practical and emotional level.

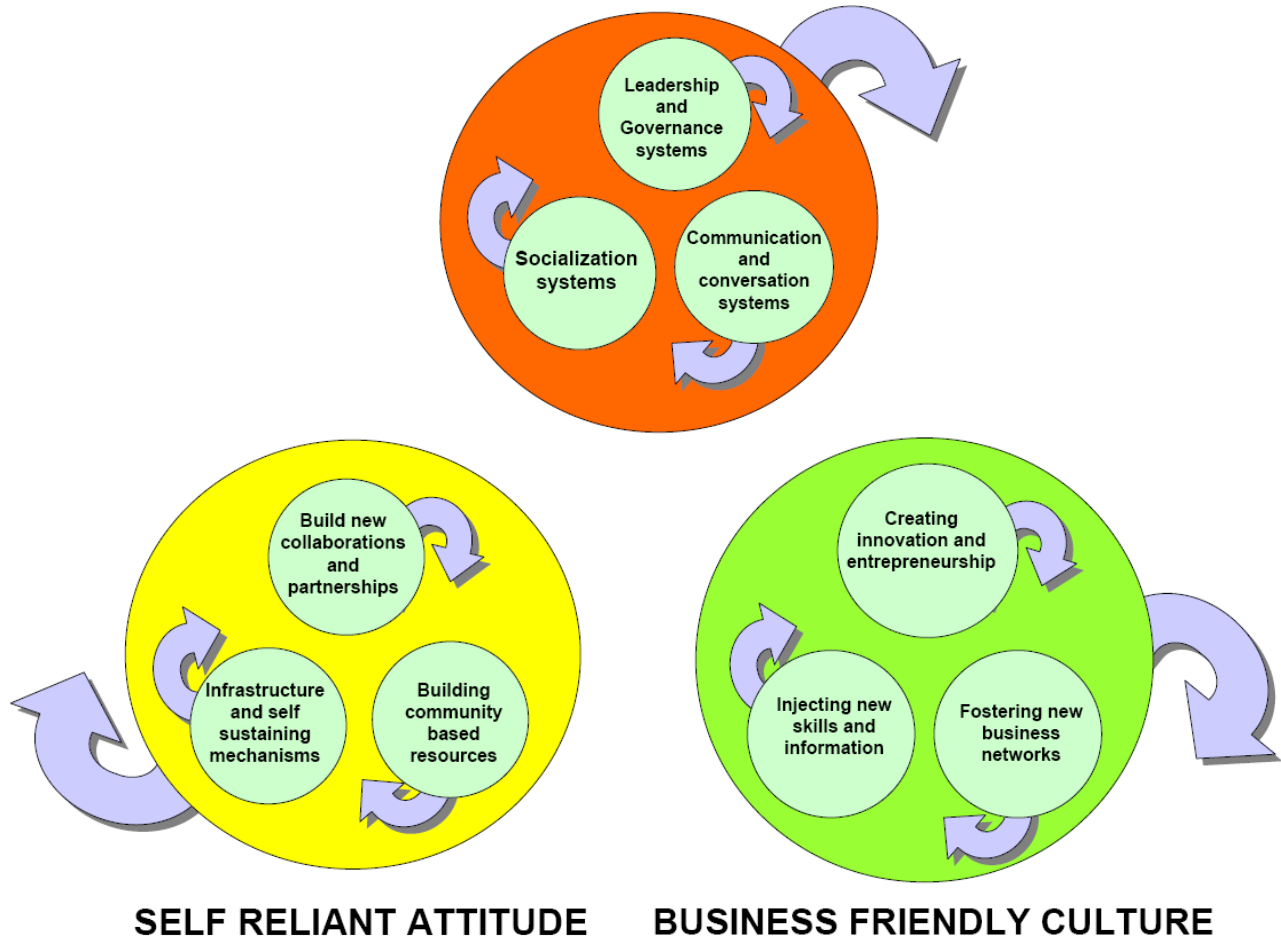


Strategies that kick-start a self reliant attitude include:

- Partnering with neighboring communities on regional initiatives
- Creating local endowed funds through Community Foundations and not-for-profits.

Collectively, the overall systems picture looks like this.....

STRONG and POSITIVE COMMUNITY SPIRIT



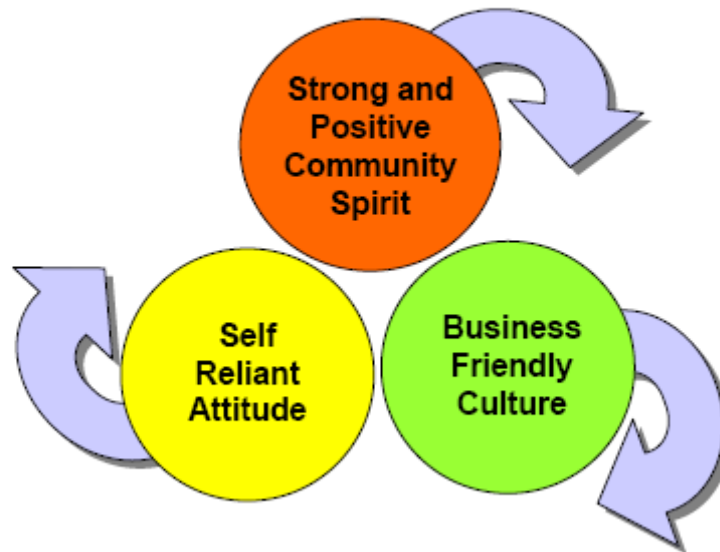
Together, these macro-systems, and their component parts, act to shape the overall prevailing contextual environment in communities.

IDAHO HORIZONS COMMUNITIES

The communities participating in the Idaho Horizons program were asked to consider their own community against the systems approach. Specifically, they were asked to self-assess their community against the following picture.

COMMUNITY DRIVERS - MACRO-SYSTEMS

What do you think is happening in your community?



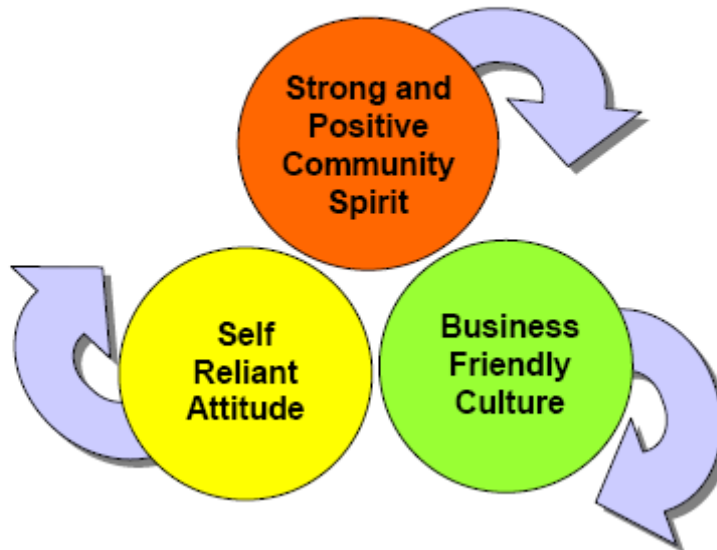
The range of answers included:

- Some pieces of the systems 'firing' but not connected to build momentum in the community.
- A complete lack of community spirit – no catalyst in the community to kick-start things.
- There are pieces present – but the whole system is stagnant or has ground to a halt.
- There is no economic vitality – the system is missing key parts of the whole.
- It is there – but not moving in a dynamic fashion.

IDAHO HORIZONS COMMUNITIES

The Idaho Horizons communities participating were asked to consider what drives poverty in their community (from the systems perspective).

COMMUNITY DRIVERS - MACRO-SYSTEMS What drives poverty?



The range of answers included:

- The whole system drives poverty – it starts with a lack of community spirit.
- People don't know there is a way out – there is a lack of clear pathways out of poverty and people are caught 'in a box'.
- The whole community culture suppresses people trying new ideas – therefore people can't step up and try to better their lives.
- There is fragmentation in the community – it keeps people and resources apart – if they were brought together; then solutions could be found.
- The school and the business community are not connected – need to work in the schools to support the entrepreneurial spirit so all young people can think about creating their own business and jobs; providing pathways out of intergenerational poverty.
- The fragmentation (lack of socialization structures) in the community stops people meeting and sharing new ideas – it limits our thinking and creativity.

THE HORIZONS PROGRAM – system design principles

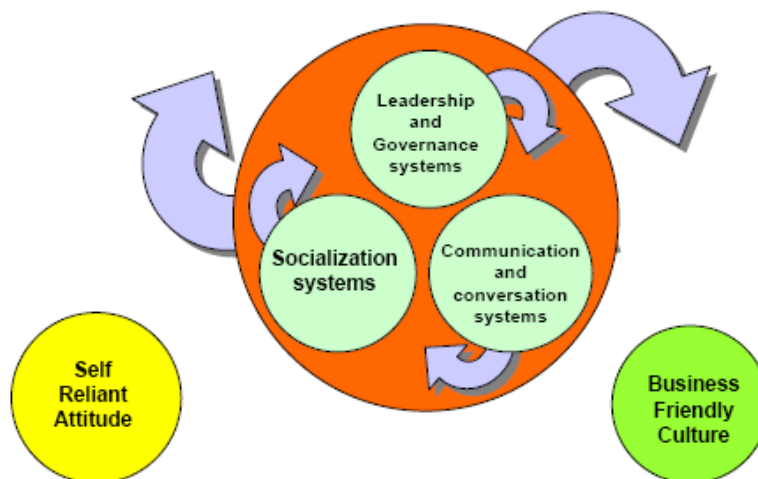
The Horizons Program is designed as a catalytic program, which allows communities to ‘kick-start’ their systems. It has a specific focus on dealing with poverty but also the flexibility to allow communities to reshape their future and overall community vitality – as an access to dealing with imbedded poverty and other insidious community issues.

The program in Horizons starts with specific programming (over the first 12 months) that targets ‘kick-starting’ the **Strong and Positive Community Spirit** macro system. This is based on the overwhelming evidence and experience that this macro system is critical to community ability to tackle tough issues. The programming that supports this includes:

- Formation of a steering committee with people from different segments of the community (building new social connections and community based leadership approaches)
- Study Circles – which allow new conversations in the community – starting with discussing and acting on poverty
- Leadership Plenty – building an expanded base of skilled and committed leaders who are able to rally the broader community around difficult topics, and stimulate dialogue on how to tackle these issues in a meaningful and inclusive manner.
- Visioning Session – allows the whole community to participate together in a powerful conversation that defines the desired future direction of the collective community. The vision will be wide ranging, including the communities future intentions regarding community experience, lifestyle, and economic direction – all of which can drive poverty or work to reduce it.

Critically, these initial program components are interlinked, to build the community momentum and drive to get this important macro system moving.

STRONG and POSITIVE COMMUNITY SPIRIT Where Horizons Starts.....



After the initial 12 months programming, by which point the community should have ‘kick-started’ the **Strong and Positive Community Spirit** macro system, the community has the capacity and ability to start ‘kick-starting’ the other systems through specific actions and working teams. The Horizons Program has programmed in support for communities to explore and implement new approaches and ideas – after the visioning sessions.

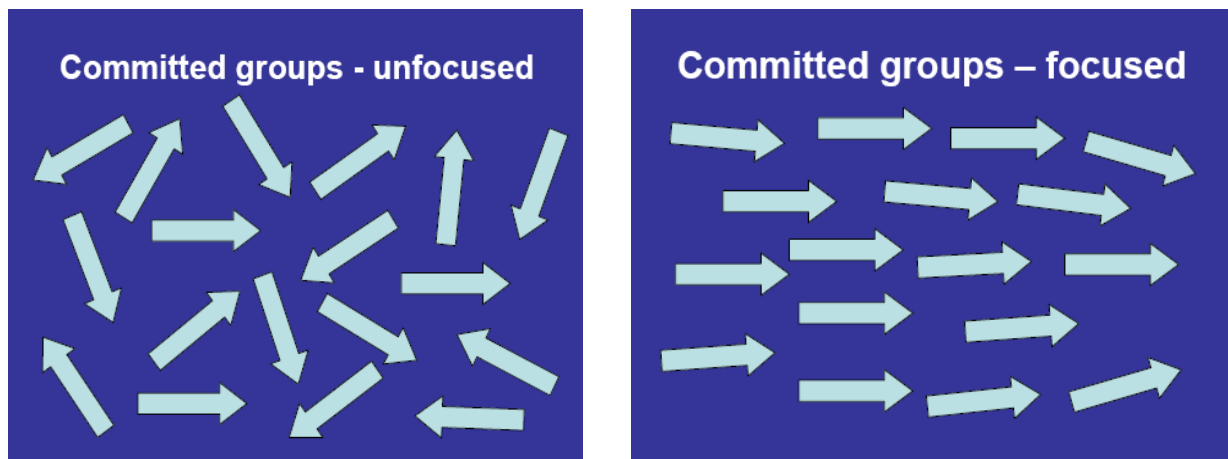
COMMUNITY VISIONING – the snap-shot!

The community visioning component of the Horizons Program, scheduled for August – November 2007, provides a catalytic opportunity for the community to come together and shape a new future.

The events aim to accomplish a major 'realignment' in the community.

In most cases, communities have numerous groups of committed groups. These include groups such as boards, councils, service groups and others. However, at the level of the community they are often 'unfocused'. This leads to confusion, wasted resources, conflict and a lack of clarity about how the whole community can make collective progress (see left hand diagram below).

The community visioning session allows the community to answer the important question of 'where do we want to go?' Once a powerful, compelling and long range community vision is created, it allows groups in the community to work together towards the fulfillment of the larger community goal (see right hand diagram below).



This important 'realignment' of the community can result in the powerful unleashing of activity, which drives the community towards the desired future. Importantly, this phenomenon creates powerful synergy between groups, and a sense of shared purpose across the community.