

8 Ways Community Heart & Soul Works

1. New leaders and volunteers emerge.

Community Heart & Soul® gets people to participate. And that trend continues as towns use Heart & Soul outreach and engagement techniques.



Residents from Gardiner, Maine

In Golden, Colorado, more than 2,000 residents, 12% of the city's population, participated in creating a plan for the future with Heart & Soul. In the past, turnout was low, and when participation was higher, it was typically driven by divisive issues.

Gardiner, Maine, is finding new volunteers on city committees, and city council candidates have emerged in numbers not seen in years.

After engaging youth in Heart & Soul in Cortez, Colorado, city leaders discovered that they wanted to be involved in community decision-making. So the city created youth seats with voting privileges on advisory boards.

2. Trust is built.

Working side by side in the Heart & Soul® process builds bridges between leaders and residents.



Enjoying a park in Cortez, Colorado

Cortez, Colorado has created trusting and productive relationships between the city and community members.

Kirsten Sackett, planning director, said: "They're understanding more about what the city does. I'm understanding their needs more. ...When somebody comes to me with a project, I want to work with them and find ways to meet the city regs while meeting their needs. It's not so much about process and paperwork anymore."

3. Downtowns are reenergized.

A thriving Main Street is a goal for nearly every community. Heart & Soul has helped deliver just that by getting communities to see the benefits of revitalizing their downtowns.



Pierre's Playhouse, Victor, Idaho

Pierre's Playhouse, in Victor, Idaho, had been dark for years. The town's only large gathering place, the theater was opened for a standing-room-only Heart & Soul event. One thing folks cared about? Pierre's Playhouse. Pierre's was reopened, bringing an important downtown asset back into the limelight.

Biddeford, Maine, was known as "Trash Town" because of the industrial garbage incinerator right downtown. But the facility provided 80 jobs in a town without a lot of options. During Biddeford's Heart & Soul project, residents were clear about wanting change. That gave officials the green light to buy the facility and close it, triggering major reinvestment downtown with over 90 new businesses and \$21 million invested in the first seven years after the Heart & Soul project.

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4. History and culture are honored.

Heart & Soul helps towns discover the importance of history and culture in creating a town's unique character.



Historic textile mills in Biddeford, Maine

A new museum was created in Biddeford, Maine, honoring the town's rich textile mill legacy. The effort was championed by local high school students and retired mill workers who rallied to help protect a vital part of what makes Biddeford unique.

5. Small investments seed big things.

Early initiatives and funding can seed far bigger investments when townspeople come together around what matters most.



Waterfront concert in Gardiner, Maine

A \$25,000 grant awarded to Gardiner, Maine, leveraged community investment valued at \$400,000. Among efforts backed by leveraged dollars were: a waterfront concert series, a design charrette for walking trails, funds for a downtown food co-op, a buy-local campaign, and a kids' activity park.

6. Businesses innovate.

When townspeople get specific about what they'd like for their town, business owners see opportunities they might have missed.



Polson Food Hub, Polson, Montana

Getting food from local farms onto dinner tables in Polson, Montana, was always the priority of the Polson Food Hub. But after listening to residents during that town's Heart & Soul project, the co-op realized it could be much more. When the Food Hub moved into a long-vacant property in the downtown, it included a community center where people could take boxing lessons, make salsa, learn how to mix and record music, try traditional tribal dance, and more.

7. Leaders get a clear road map.

Understanding what matters most to residents paves the way for innovative zoning changes that support those priorities.

Exeter, Rhode Island, residents put a high priority on preserving small town feel and rural character. That laid a foundation for approval of innovative zoning that traded residential development in large-lot subdivisions for village-like settings. This supported Exeter's small town feel while preserving open land, two attributes residents valued.



Downtown Damariscotta, Maine

Town officials in Damariscotta, Maine, are aligning capital projects with what matters most to residents. That means support from the public for projects like sidewalks and waterfront redevelopment, which ultimately helps protect and foster the town's Heart & Soul.

8. Pride is restored.

One of the things residents notice, even early on, is how Community Heart & Soul restores a sense of pride among townspeople.



Heart & Soul parade float in McComb, Ohio

The Heart & Soul Team in McComb, Ohio, started things off with a bang over the Fourth of July holiday weekend. From the start, the Team was on the move, reaching out to as many residents as possible, marching in the town's celebrated Cookie Festival, connecting with locals at the Fire Department chicken BBQ and handing out rally towels at high school football games, among other events.

One resident observed a positive impact right out of the gate: "You know what I love about Heart & Soul? People feel they can be proud of McComb. I've already seen so much good. ...And it's just the start."

By asking people what they love about McComb, Heart & Soul got people thinking in terms of their town's assets and possibilities. This rekindled a sense of pride.