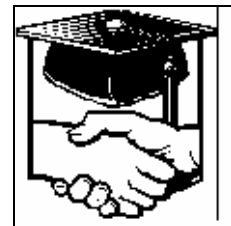


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# How Can Universities and Colleges Become More Useful to Rural Communities Pursuing Development?



Rainbow Research Inc.

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*Prepared for*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To learn how universities and colleges can become more useful resources to rural communities in economic development efforts, from 1988 to 1990 Rainbow Research studied pilot projects funded by Northwest Area Foundation in Iowa, Washington and Idaho where public universities were experimenting with new ways of assisting rural communities.

The experience of these three projects indicates that institutions of higher education indeed can be valued resources to rural communities pursuing economic development. However, they're not ideal. Community service involves different timelines and different applications of their expertise than most faculty are used to. And there are too few institutional rewards for community service.

To increase colleges' and universities' usefulness to rural communities we recommend these steps:

1. Make community service an explicit part of the institution's mission statement, and of faculty and staff performance standards. Apply these standards to all faculty, not just designated "extension" specialists. Reward community service with the full range of institutional incentives, including tenure, titles, money, office enhancements, and favorable administrative treatment.
2. Modify school funding formulas, and institutional evaluation standards, to support other forms of community service besides enrollment of for-credit students and offering of classroom courses. Reward schools that are innovative and responsive to rural community concerns, and penalize those who decline to get involved.
3. Sponsor more community service centers. While the proliferation of "centers" and "institutes" can easily be satirized, nonetheless these terms send signals to faculty and communities alike that at these places, something other than academics-as-usual is occurring. Centers can be nexuses for interdisciplinary and applied work – in other words, for the kinds of activity most useful to communities and economic development practitioners. They can be havens where that minority of faculty and students interested in community service can find kindred spirits, at least until the

day when community service permeates everything that the institution does.

4. Make university resources more available in these ways:
  - Make sure that institutional policies permit rather than obstruct community service.
  - Subsidize direct costs of rural community service at least by reimbursing telephone and travel costs.
  - Make community service an integral part of more students' education, through increased use of internships, independent study projects, and class field projects. Support such activities with academic credit, credit toward degrees and honors, and stipends and expense reimbursements.
5. Increase the number of "field staff" or "extension specialists" whose primary purpose is to help make things happen in communities – not in classrooms or laboratories. Ideally they will have skills in the processes of community development, in diverse aspects of business and employment development, and in packaging and facilitating teams of other university resources to assist community endeavors.

Policymakers and educators wanting to increase the usefulness of higher education institutions to rural community development should be aware that the requirements of community service differ in many ways from what happens on campus. Consulting is different than teaching; problem-solving is different than problem-assigning; workshops are different than semester courses; public speaking is different than lecturing; real-life problems are different from textbook case studies; rural community leaders and business operators are different from young college students.

Universities and colleges in these three projects discovered that to be most useful to rural communities, they had to adjust to these differences.

Based on the experience of these pilot projects, we can say that three ingredients are critical to universities being useful to rural community development efforts:

- they must be able to deliver their skills and knowledge in a community setting;
- they must have skills and knowledge relevant to rural communities' concerns; and
- they must be available and accessible, ready to share their relevant skills and knowledge.

# INTRODUCTION

How can universities and colleges become more useful resources to rural communities in economic development efforts? Seeking answers to that question, for the past two and a half years Rainbow Research studied pilot projects funded by Northwest Area Foundation in Iowa, Washington and Idaho where public universities were experimenting with new ways of making themselves useful to rural communities.

Based on the experience of these pilot projects, we can say that three ingredients are critical to universities being useful to rural community development efforts:

- they must be able to deliver their skills and knowledge in a community setting;
- they must have skills and knowledge relevant to rural communities' concerns; and
- they must be available and accessible, ready to share their relevant skills and knowledge.

This question of usefulness must be raised because the requirements of community service differ in so many ways from what happens on campus. Consulting is different from teaching; problem-solving is different from problem-assigning; workshops are different from semester courses; public speaking is different from lecturing; real-life problems are different from textbook case studies; rural community leaders and business operators are different from young college students.

Universities and colleges in these three projects discovered that to be most useful to rural communities, they had to adjust to these differences.

Let us briefly describe each state's project, and then elaborate on these three ingredients.

- Iowa State University's Southern Iowa Development District (SIDD) project ran from 1986 through 1989. SIDD was sponsored by the College of Design. It focused on an eight-county region in southwestern Iowa, centered on Creston.

A core goal for Iowa State was to promote regional approaches to community development. Guided by regional advisory committees, ISU faculty conducted

region-wide research such as attitude surveys and transportation network analyses. Faculty and project field staff encouraged regional cooperation – across the eight counties altogether, or among smaller grouping of cities and counties – such as formation of a regional tourism council, marketing campaign, and “antiquing trail.” Specialized assistance to single communities was not provided until the latter stages of the project.

- In Washington, the Rural Economic Assistance Program (REAP), 1987-1990, had a statewide geographic focus. It worked with distressed single cities or small regional groupings (two or three towns, or a county) across the state through demonstration projects and discretionary grant projects, which varied in length from a few months up to about two years. It also produced publications and workshops intended to serve economic development practitioners throughout the state.

The Washington project featured a high degree of cooperation between higher education and the state government, plus the participation of multiple higher education institutions. REAP was jointly sponsored by an education consortium (the Partnership for Rural Improvement, known as PRI), which included the land grant Washington State University plus the regional Eastern and Central Washington Universities and several community colleges, along with the state Department of Community Development. Faculty and students from the University of Idaho also took part in several community projects. The two sponsors together hired and supervised a program coordinator, held joint staff retreats and training sessions, and encouraged collaboration between state and university field staff on specific community projects and technical assistance offerings.

- Idaho’s Rural Community Revitalization Project is the youngest of the three state experiments; it began in 1988 and has Northwest Area Foundation funding through mid-1991. Based at Idaho State University in Pocatello, the regional university for southeastern Idaho, this project counts as partners the two-year College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls, and the three planning and development agencies for southeastern, east-central and southern Idaho.

This project has selected three communities, one in each sub-region, as demonstration sites to receive intensive assistance over the full three-year grant period.

Originally sponsored by the President’s office at ISU, the project moved in 1990 under the dean of the College of Business.

## **ABLE TO DELIVER IN A COMMUNITY SETTING**

University resource people who wish to be of service to rural community development efforts must recognize and adapt to the ways in which working with a community to advance its economic development aspirations differs from what they do on campus.

Perhaps the most important key in that transition is to focus on immediate, practical usefulness. You are there to help community people reach their goals and solve the problems that are in their way, first and foremost. If you can impart an understanding of the economic system, or principles of accounting, or planning techniques generally, so much the better; but it must be in service to moving them forward in their own agendas. These aren't impressionable youngsters curious about how things work, here to earn a degree, who might apply their knowledge in some unknown future job. They're adults with families, full-time jobs, mortgages, trying to make something happen in their lives and in their communities now.

Useful resource people don't hurry, but are brief and to the point. For those preparing reports, single-page handouts and an oral presentation are better than (or at least should accompany) thick tomes. For those leading workshops, the challenge is to strip your message to the essentials: you've got a few sessions to get your main points across, instead of several weeks of lectures with hundreds of pages of reading in between. And always, focus on action: what can people do? What are the key questions to answer in order to make a decision?

Faculty and students that do well in a community setting, we are told, are those that listen more than they talk, and listen before they talk. They wait to hear the questions before giving their answers. They try to work with local solutions rather than prescribing totally different solutions.

They also show respect to local culture and values. This means doing like the Romans when in Rome – dressing the way they dress, eating in their restaurants, speaking in plain English. It means meeting people on their own turf in addition to holding office hours.

## **Students and Faculty**

Students and faculty in these projects brought different strengths and weaknesses to community settings. Faculty have more knowledge and expertise and are more able to give accurate answers to technical questions. Usually they are more skilled at facilitating community processes, if a community is unclear about what it wants to do. A good student, in contrast, brings energy for the task that can be terrifically productive, and enthusiasm for

a community's goals and for action as opposed to mere study, that can be infectious. A community project can be a delightful tonic for students: instead of being of low status as on campus, they rapidly earn respect and appreciation as they prove their usefulness to the community. "A good graduate student is worth two faculty," one broker told us.

Faculty and students face different difficulties. Faculty may make the mistake of expecting the same deference in a rural community that they receive in the campus community from students and other lesser beings. They forget that the books they may have written, the rank they've achieved, the theories and authorities they can cite don't command the same awe among people outside the academic culture.

We heard that without clear guidance, a faculty member may operate like "a loose cannon on the deck": serving up unwanted, irrelevant, possibly offensive products – plans that head toward a future that residents don't want, a report that lies unread, or comments that condescend toward local values or capabilities.

With students, we heard that the biggest problem is that they may "spin their wheel" and not finish their work. They may be shy about talking to townspeople, especially leaders who are usually much older than they. They lose the focus of their work more easily than do faculty. They more often lose time to personal concerns than do faculty. Students in these projects did best when they had close supervision both from a faculty member and from a community leader, and when they had broad familiarity with the community – for example, if they were from that town or county themselves.

## **The Value of Field Staff**

All three projects found that field staff played a key role in ensuring effective community delivery of resources. They delivered many resources themselves – especially formative assistance with early stages of organizing and planning, and ongoing nurturing of the community's overall framework and vision. And as broker between community and university they helped faculty and students make the transition from campus to community. They stayed involved, too, providing guidance and facilitation to ensure that community service projects went smoothly and to everyone's satisfaction.

Several ingredients contributed to field staff effectiveness:

- Their work rhythm was synchronized not to the academic calendar but to the timelines of the communities with which they worked. This allowed them to provide both the continuous contact that helped communities keep on track, and the quick-response assistance that took advantage of sudden opportunities.

- Success for the communities they worked with was their top goal. They didn't have to fit community concerns together with a research or teaching agenda (except as brokers).
- They related very effectively to rural community people. They were fluent in the language and manners appropriate there, and less affected by the more pernicious tendencies of the university's social order. The three lead field staff all had significant "real world" experience: one had directed a multi-county rural economic development organizations, one had farmed with her husband been active in community affairs, one was a city council member.
- They were willing to be motivators, believers, encouragers of local community action. Faculty and students were more likely to provide information alone, without the inspirational dimension that field staff communicated.

In short, field staff were effective assistance providers because of the ways in which they were different from mainstream faculty and students.

Still, to broker other university resources it helped field staff to be based on campus and sponsored by the institution. This made it convenient for them to get acquainted with various faculty, and to stay in touch with the nuances of campus incentives and politics. This helped them know how to package community service projects so as to leverage the most university resources.

## RELEVANT SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Skills and knowledge relevant to rural community economic development can be found in many academic departments. We learned from these three projects that universities and colleges can help communities especially in three areas:

1. **Starting and moving forward in a development process.** This includes helping organize a development leadership group with broadly representative membership; and helping them acquire skills in values clarification, conflict resolution, consensus building, group decision-making, and internal and external communications. It also includes helping design and facilitate “Town Hall Meetings: or “Community Days” that can elicit attention, participation and ownership from the full community membership. Specialized community outreach staff, and **planning** and **political science** departments, were the main sources of this expertise in these projects.

Taking inventory of local resources, problems and perceptions through various survey and data collection steps (such as community audits and community attitude surveys) is another early part of the development process with which universities often can help. **Sociology** departments along with planning and political science typically have these skills. **Education** schools also may have survey expertise.

Interpreting the implications of broader economic and demographic trends for specific communities is another part of development planning. Together with analysis of local data, this provides a backdrop upon which plans can be made and priorities identified. It can be used to “sell” the community when recruiting external funding sources or industries, as well. Sociology and **economics** departments provided this assistance in these projects.

**Architecture** and **landscape architecture** departments in the Washington and Iowa projects (there are not such departments at the two Idaho schools) helped communities inventory and analyze their current physical condition, and through drawings, models and video productions depicted new streetscape and community design possibilities. These visual presentations powerfully mobilized and focused community action, and were also important tools for enlisting outside assistance or investment to help realize local plans.

Planning departments also helped communities complete formal planning documents – “master plans,” “comprehensive park and recreation plans,” etc. These plans can give a framework to local development efforts for several years, and are necessary attachments to many state and federal grant requests.

2. **Analyzing and advancing specific development options.** This includes feasibility studies, business plans, and marketing advice typically provided by **business** and **economics** departments. In Iowa, business and economics faculty helped analyze the prospects for new hotels and bed-and-breakfast inns, analyzed the probable impact of Wal-Mart store openings on nearby towns' retailers, and helped leaders in one town evaluate whether a new grocery store would be viable. In Idaho, a marketing professor and his students are helping research and plan for a possible hay and wood pelletizing plant.

Technical assessments of economic ideas can be furnished by science and engineering departments. A **geology** professor in Idaho is analyzing possible geothermal energy applications. In another project in northern Idaho, **forestry** faculty at the University of Idaho are helping sawmill operators adapt their processes to new market niches. In Washington, a home-based chocolatier had the exact composition of her wares assayed by a Washington State University **chemistry** laboratory. Other inventors can also have their innovations scrutinized for safety, patentability and commercial viability at the WSU Innovation Center.

**Transportation planners** helped evaluate prospects for improved trucking practices in the Iowa SIDD Project, and for inter-city passenger transport in Idaho. This of course is a variation on the traditional specialty of land grant research and extension programs – finding practical local applications for new technologies.

**Marketing, graphic design** and **communications** departments can help design promotional campaigns, logs, brochures, billboards for specific events, industries, or aspects of a community's image. For example, an Iowa State graphic design professor designed a tourism brochure for regional distribution.

3. **Training local business operators and workers in on-the-job skills.** Assuring a trained labor force for local employers is a specialty of many community colleges. These projects did a variation on that theme by presenting workshops for current employees, small business owners, and people considering starting their own (perhaps home-based) businesses.

Topics included a range of small business management issues – planning, management, marketing, budgeting, personnel, tax matters. Cooperative marketing and other strategies for stemming retail “leakage” (in which local residents and workers do their shopping elsewhere) was another popular topic. Training for retail employees and others with public contact in how to be most hospitable and courteous to customers and town visitors was also offered in several communities.

**Business** facilities generally provided this assistance. In addition, this was an area in

which universities often relied on outside consultants and practicing business operators – sometimes people with a regular contract or adjunct faculty status.

Two types of expertise seemed to be most prized by community representatives in these projects. One was knowledge of effective strategies to ignite and sustain community economic development efforts: “We learned how to get beyond coffee-shop arguments,” said one local leader. The other was information on “what works” – proven examples of successful development that can inspire, be adapted, or be replicated locally.

## **AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE**

To be useful, a university's relevant expertise must be available and accessible to rural communities.

These projects found three primary ways to make known the availability of campus-based resources.

1. **Field staff**, familiar with the resources available on campus, spent a lot of time out in rural communities interacting with rural residents. These brokers were by far the most important route by which communities became acquainted with and gained access to campus resources.

Field staff play a key matchmaking role. From the experience of these three projects we can say that the best field staff are intimately familiar with both the community and the external resource. Community familiarity means knowing:

- the community's projects or problems so that one can recognize the kinds of aid – people, formats, timelines, as well as topics – that would most help; and
- local history, politics, culture and other considerations for resource persons to keep in mind in order to be most useful there.

Familiarity with campus (or other external) resources means knowing:

- who has the skills or information that can respond to a community's specific concerns;
- what kinds of projects, incentives, timelines and compensations those resource persons find most attractive. For example, some professors may want class projects, others may want to collaborate with other faculty, others may want single-student internships, others may want a contract to them alone;
- how to orient the resource person(s) to the community's unique features that can make work there easy or difficult.

The Washington project worked to expand the number of field staff able to broker university resources by increasing the ability of state agency staff to take on that role. In particular, several steps were taken to help staff from the Department of Community development's Community Revitalization Team become familiar with college and university faculty, programs and services.

2. **Community contact leads to more community contact.** Getting faculty, programs and institutions out where they can be seen in action powerfully broadcasts availability. Faculty can appear in limited roles – for example, as speakers to economic development organizations’ annual meetings, or presenters at regional conferences of community economic development activists – to give community people an initial introduction to them. If a university resource performs effectively for one community, word or mouth will quickly generate similar requests from other communities, particularly in states that nurture networks of local economic development practitioners such as Washington.
3. **Written directories** of university resources were prepared in the Idaho and Washington projects. These had two purposes: to acquaint community people with the range of assistance available, and to increase their ability to contact resource providers directly instead of depending on go-betweens such as university field staff.

These were produced too late in the project for us to see how well they actually were used by rural activists. We did hear from several local leaders that while they’d like to know the full range of resources available, they prefer meeting people directly or getting personal referrals to a resource person, rather than relying on a book.

Other written channels that can boost visibility include newsletters and brochures; releasing information through others’ newsletters (such as of regional councils of government and state community development agencies); and press releases and public service announcements for mass media.

It may seem obvious, but professional and personal interest play a big role in whether resources are available and accessible. In applied disciplines such as planning and to a lesser extent architecture, landscape architecture, and geography, many faculty are eager for community projects as learning opportunities for their students. In these pilot projects it was faculty from these departments who also saw professional research (as distinct from service) opportunities in community projects: to learn better ways of doing planning and design, and to experiment with new ways to teach students.

Personal motives also loom large. In these projects, those faculty most involved were those who personally believed it was important, who had a fondness for rural communities, who may have come from a small town themselves or choose to live in one now. They made themselves available not because it was their job or because it was encouraged and rewarded by their institution, but because they like doing it. The most successful internships probably were those in which a student returned to his home town to do a project.

Personal motives are important because in general, community service is the stepsister to research and teaching in the value systems of higher education institutions. It's on the margins of the institution's mission, not at the core.

However, institutions can take many steps to make resources more available. In rough order of increasing commitment, these include:

1. **Permit faculty to provide community service.** If a faculty member wants to work with communities in addition to his or her other job responsibilities, at least the school can get out of the way and allow this.

This is not as simple as it first seems. Several institutional policies or expectations are involved:

- How much time may faculty members sell without seeking special permission – one day a week? three days? no limits? only when school is not in session?
  - What may faculty charge for community consultations – whatever the market will bear? their daily salary rate? only direct expenses, with their time considered to be compensated through their university salary? what share of fees will the institution claim for overhead?
  - Are different types of clients to be treated differently – small communities, larger cities, individual businesses, groups of businesses, unions, other workers' groups?
2. **Respect and encourage student involvement in community projects.** Class projects, independent study projects and internships in communities all can be encouraged. They can be rewarded with academic credit, and made integral parts of degree programs. Producing a product or service useful to a community can be accorded its full worth, instead of belittling it in favor of an approach requiring students to treat communities as laboratories.
  3. **Encourage and reward faculty for community service.** Many schools bestow Public Service Awards, and these are valuable, but they tend to reward performance beyond the call of duty. Community service also can be an explicit criterion in performance reviews, tenure decisions, and the rest of the institutional reward system. What if those faculty most useful to rural communities received the corner offices, the best equipment, the biggest raises, the most promotions?

One easy way to encourage service is to create “centers” for community service, where like-minded faculty and students can provide the collegial support that may be lacking in regular departments. For example, Idaho State University created a Center

for Rural Economic Development and a Center for Business Research and Service.

4. **Be flexible in releasing faculty from teaching and administrative duties as community opportunities arise.** While the most convenient involvements fit neatly into a semester or summer, community timelines are often longer and/or shorter than that. Community development efforts often are ongoing for several years, and benefit from sustained contact over that time. Schools that would be useful must accommodate these protracted off-campus responsibilities. This generally requires support from high-level administrators to hire substitute staff and set appropriate policies.

Conversely in community projects, both crises (e.g., a breakdown in community consensus, a building fire or bridge collapse, or a decision by a major corporation or funding source to pull out) and opportunities (e.g., public hearings or meetings with out-of-town government or corporate officials) can pop up suddenly. Involved faculty need to be able to attend meetings and hearings, often during school hours, on a week or a day's notice. This requires support from departmental colleagues, to cover classroom duties for the day.

5. **Subsidize the costs of community service.** This starts with telephone, travel, and material costs. It could include faculty salaries (or release time), and funds for student assistantships and internships. This is part of the Extension model, of course; it's an extra expense for other faculty and schools.

## **The Role of Departments, and of Higher Administrative Units**

Both departments and higher levels of college administration can obstruct or expedite community service.

Support from top administrators – at least deans and ideally provosts and presidents – is vital if community service is to be more than an isolated, occasional practice by predisposed individuals. In setting the tone and articulating the mission of the institution, top administrators send signals to the faculty (and to communities in the region) as to what's important. They can recruit, reward and protect faculty and staff who are responsive to community concerns and choose to spend time at it. With their influence over budgets and policy they have the greatest power to make sure that the institution puts its money where its mouth is. They can overrule cautious department heads that might be discouraging community service initiatives by individual faculty.

In land grant schools such as Iowa State and Washington State Universities, support from the Dean of Extension appeared to be crucial. In these states, the Dean of Extension expressed strong support for these pilot projects and took steps to perpetuate them through Extension after Northwest Area Foundation support ended – even though Extension did not originally sponsor the pilot project.

At the two Idaho colleges, neither of the land grant schools, the president's office played a key role. At College of Southern Idaho, the president dispatched his assistant to meet with communities in the region, exploring new ways that the college might be of service to them. He also intervened in one department where a professor was being discouraged from doing community service projects or off-campus student internships. At Idaho State University, the Rural Community Revitalization Project was housed in the president's office for its first two years until it acquired sufficient credibility and momentum that it could be moved under the dean of the College of Business.

Departments, too, can promote or oppose community service. In a sympathetic department, community service can flourish independently of the institution's commitment overall. First, the importance of collegiality should not be underestimated. Colleagues can cover for one another in the classroom to gain flexibility for community involvement – or can chastise the other for not keeping classroom obligations sacred. Colleagues can help one another interpret their community experiences and integrate them with research and teaching concerns; they can share students and do projects together. Conversely, they can shun and condescend toward colleagues who pursue work in communities. Second, faculty performance reviews begin in the department; this is the first point at which community involvement is officially rewarded, overlooked, or penalized.

Departments can set up structures to circumvent onerous university regulations. For example, at one regional university in Washington, a department has its own foundation which receives funds from communities and other supports of community involvement. These funds are used to pay student assistants and other community service expenses directly without losing a big bite to university overhead fees.

## **Making Community Service Projects Most Attractive**

To get the most help out of universities and colleges, brokers and communities should package community assistance projects to fit the resource person's core concerns of research and training of degree students.

Fitting community work into a faculty member's plan of research involves letting them try out new methods or models. One broker told us that faculty are eager to help when they can be assured of a steady stream of projects over several years. This allows them to budget their time, and to shape a "plan of research" with predictable opportunities for journal articles which they must write in order to advance in their profession.

One tension between faculty and community interests is that academics are under pressure from their peers to experiment with new methods and theories. Communities, in contrast, would rather use something tried and true than be some professor's testing ground.

Involving students is a sure way to involve faculty, since they'll have to supervise their students. Students typically can contribute most in the early phases of a project, when elementary research or the rapid sketching of many alternatives is most useful. This matches their unpolished skill level, and also involves conceptual work which contributes most to their own learning. Students can be involved either by the classful, or one or a few students at a time in internships or independent study projects.

Either way, these community projects must match academic timelines. This may mean putting community efforts on hold until the next academic session. For example, one Idaho community wanted to research the feasibility of a new business idea. They found two options at Idaho State University: (1) wait until the next semester when a marketing professor could put a team of students to work on the projects; (2) hire the professor immediately, at consultant rates, to do the research himself. They chose the lower-cost, though slower, student option.

## **Differences Among Types of Institutions**

Community colleges, regional universities and land grant universities face different pressures that affect their availability for and interest in community service.

Generally speaking, the more prestigious the institution, the more resources it has to share but the less likely it is to be interested in local community service.

Land grant universities clearly have the most resources available to share. They are most likely to have useful equipment such as computers, videos, and laboratories for various analyses. They may have more discretionary funds for travel, materials, telephones. They have more graduate students, and tend to attract more capable students than do less prestigious institutions. Their faculty carry the lightest teaching loads.

On the other hand, land grant faculty may be less likely to have local interests. They're more likely to be concerned with the opinions of their national and international professional peers. With lighter teaching loads, they face greater pressure to produce research findings publishable in peer-referred academic journals. This value system rewards innovation ahead of proven usefulness. It rewards clearly defined and controlled experiments ahead of the eclectic, frequently-changing activities common to community economic development. It rewards clearly measurable results ahead of the more intangible residues of changed local perceptions, networks, and skills.

The land grant mission clearly names "service" as one of its three cornerstones, which may give the land grant university an edge over a straightforward research university in sharing itself with local communities. Certainly, Extension faculty are a highly available faculty resource. But practically speaking, designating special "Extension" faculty has the effect of absolving the rest of the institution from service obligations. Other faculty tend to behave like those at a nationally-oriented research university.

Regional universities and community colleges may be more interested in community service. "Publish or perish" is not a faculty requirement here as at the land grants (though publishing is a sure way to enhance one's prestige). Other values are more important, including love of place and caring for one's students and neighbors. Since they're younger than land grant universities (many were created only in the last 30 years as the GI Bill and the baby boom enlarged the demand for higher education), community colleges and regional universities have few laurels to rest on and often are more eager to prove their worth to local constituencies.

Furthermore, faculty at regional and community colleges may be more hungry for the financial rewards of fee-for-service community work. They are paid less than faculty at more prestigious institutions; and their departments are eager to earn funds for equipment, student stipends, and so forth.

Several factors hamper the usefulness of these institutions to rural communities, however. Their faculty carry heavier teaching loads and have less schedule flexibility; community college faculty especially can be chained to their classrooms. This is not surprising in light of

the fact that these institutions receive funding almost exclusively in proportion to the number of for-credit students they enroll. They receive almost no funds for other types of service or research, except through special programs such as Small Business Development Centers.

These institutions are more likely than land grants to lack certain academic disciplines useful to community development. For example, planning, architecture and landscape architecture are not available at Idaho State University and College of Southern Idaho.

Two year colleges typically have fewer students with the skills and maturity to serve usefully in community projects. We also saw hints at some community colleges that their faculty observed the manners of academic formality – which generally are useless friction in a community project – more dogmatically than did faculty at less locally-oriented institutions.

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Institutions of higher education indeed can be valued resources to rural communities pursuing economic development. However, they're not ideal. Community service involves different timelines and different applications of their expertise that most faculty are used to. And there are too few institutional rewards for community service.

To increase colleges' and universities' usefulness to rural communities we recommend these steps:

1. Make community service an explicit part of the institution's mission statement, and of faculty and staff performance standards. Apply these standards to all faculty, not just designated "extension" specialists. Reward community service with the full range of institutional incentives, including tenure, titles, money, office enhancements, and favorable administrative treatment.
2. Modify school funding formulas, and institutional evaluation standards, to support other forms of community service besides enrollment of for-credit students and offering of classroom courses. Reward schools that are innovative and responsive to rural community concerns, and penalize those who decline to get involved.
3. Sponsor more community service centers. While the proliferation of "centers" and "institutes" can easily be satirized, nonetheless these terms send signals to faculty and communities alike that at these places, something other than academics-as-usual is occurring. Centers can be nexuses for interdisciplinary and applied work – in other words, for the kinds of activity most useful to communities and economic development practitioners. They can be havens where that minority of faculty and students interested in community service permeates everything that the institution does.
4. As described in more detail on pages 12-13, make university resources more available in these ways:
  - Make sure that institutional policies permit rather than obstruct community service.
  - Subsidize direct costs of rural community service at least by reimbursing telephone and travel costs.
  - Make community service an integral part of more students' education, through increased use of internships, independent study projects, and class field projects.

Support such activities with academic credit, credit toward degrees and honors, and stipends and expense reimbursements.

5. Increase the number of “field staff” or “extension specialists” whose primary purpose is to help make things happen in communities – not in classrooms or laboratories. Ideally they will have skills in the processes of community development, and in packaging and facilitating teams of other university resources to assist community endeavors.



**O**ur mission is to help increase the effectiveness and impact of socially concerned organizations in responding to social problems. We work in support of organizations and communities to help them achieve their goals.

**Y**our organization and community can experience these results from participation in Rainbow Research activities – tailored studies, workshops, and partnerships – and use of our tools and publications.

**W**e can help you to:

**Improve your understanding** of key program elements that contribute to program effectiveness.

**Improve program impact** through integrating principles of program effectiveness into day-to-day operations.

**Improve management** of resources to achieve program purposes.

**Improve the fit** between your organization's activities and your community's needs and opportunities.

**Improve commitment** of staff and Board to your organization's mission.

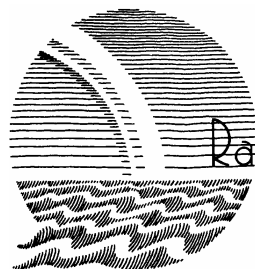
**Improve communication** between your organization and its various stakeholders and publics.

**Improve linkages** between your organization and other like-minded organizations.

**Improve access** to tools and support services that strengthen program performance.

**R**elated Rainbow Research Publications:

- **Rethinking "Leadership": Notes on Community, Collaboration and Strategies for Systemic Change;** By David Scheie and Steven E. Mayer; *16 pages plus summary (1990); #085 - \$5.00*
- **Creating a More Sustainable Food and Farming System: Lessons from an Integrated Farming Systems Initiative;** By David Scheie; *4 pages (1996); #083 - \$5.00*
- **The Importance of Community Collaboration to Support Sustainable Agriculture;** By Oran Hesterman, David Scheie and Betty Mosley; *13 pages (1996); #081 - \$6.00*



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