

Assessment Approach and Model

The overall design of the Small Towns Project was created by HandMade in America. Representatives from participating small towns and technical advisors assisting the project have refined the design as we learned together.

Preparation

In preparation for the Resource Team's visit to Marshall, the Revitalization Committee, composed of volunteers appointed by the Town Board, engaged in several activities. The Town hosted two visits to educate the community about HandMade in America and downtown revitalization. Becky Anderson, Executive Director of HandMade in America, addressed the community at these two meetings. Leslie Anderson (no relation), consultant to HandMade in America and team coordinator, and other HandMade in America staff met with volunteers on several occasions to prepare for the visit. Committees worked to make all the arrangements for the Assessment.

In order to generate data and focus the community on its future, Leslie Anderson conducted a brainstorming session at one of the assessment planning meetings. The group supplied responses to the following questions: *What hopes do you have for Marshall? What are the strengths of Marshall?* Responses were forwarded to the Team prior to their arrival [see Appendix for responses].

A package of materials was given to Team members for advance preparation. Compilation of the package afforded the revitalization committee members the opportunity to do some helpful research. Among the activities were:

- Photographing the downtown core area as it existed in July 1999.
- Gathering photos and maps for use during the Assessment.
- Gathering a short history of Marshall and Madison County.
- Gathering available demographic data on Marshall and Madison County.
- Collecting brochures of area businesses, attractions, and lodging accommodations.
- Gathering newspaper articles about relevant topics.

Other logistical arrangements were also necessary to prepare for the visit that was accomplished by the revitalization group. They included:

- Arranging meetings and meal functions at various churches.
- Arranging for lodging, meals, and tours.
- Securing headquarters for the activities.
- Compiling a list of persons to be interviewed and contacting them.
- Speaking with key opinion leaders concerning the Assessment.
- Working with the local newspapers to carry stories about the Small Towns Project.

Prior to the Team's visit, deliberate attempts were made to inform citizens about the project, the visit of the Team, and how citizens could participate.

Announcements were made at various meetings; specific people were telephoned or visited; and stories were carried in the local newspapers – all of which helped to secure participation in the Assessment. At the conclusion of the Assessment, it is estimated that close to 100 people took part.

Model Design

The National Main Street Program for Small Town Revitalization, developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, was used as the foundation for the model applied in the Marshall assessment. The value of the Main Street Program has been proven again and again in small towns throughout North Carolina and in over 700 small towns across the United States. The model is community specific, understandable, comprehensive, adaptable, affirms strengths, and builds sustainable community and economic development. The towns selected for HandMade's Small Towns Project are too small for participation in the official Main Street program. Main Street principles, however, are easily adaptable for communities that fall under and over the target population.

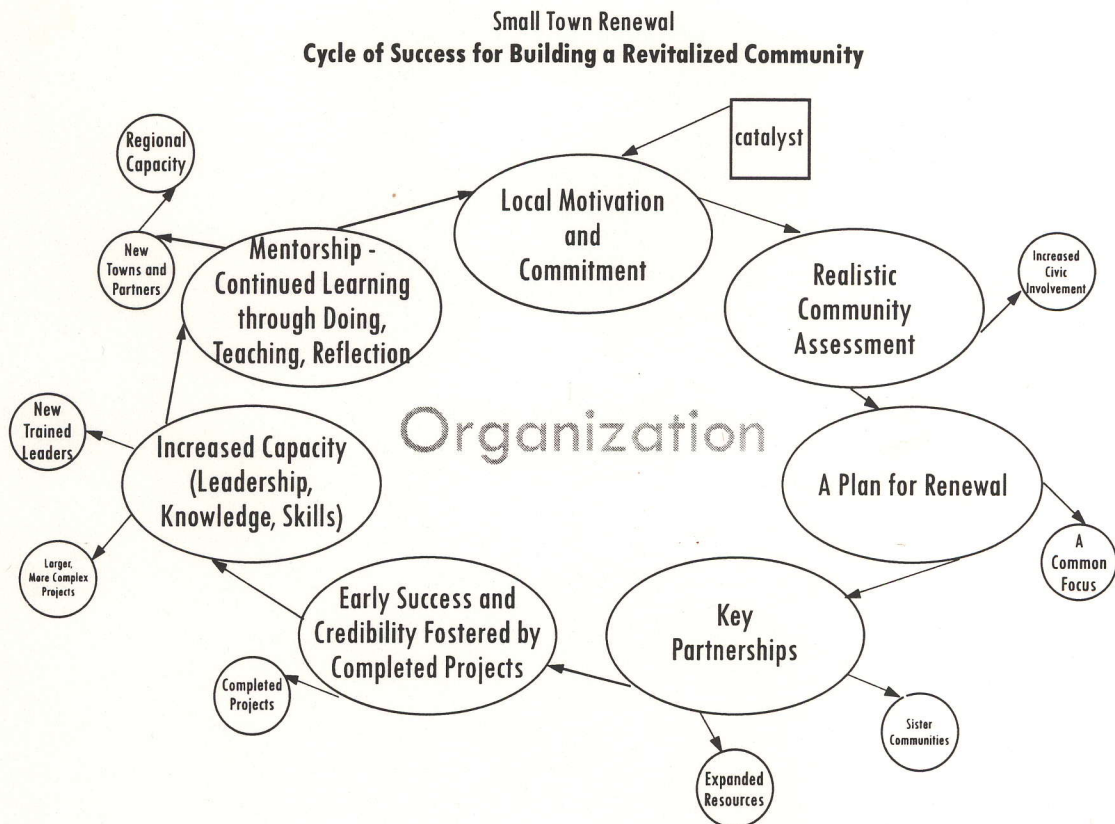
The four components of the Main Street program were used in the Assessment:

1. Marketing and Promotion.
2. Economic Restructuring.
3. Design.
4. Organization.

A fifth component, landscape, was highlighted for the Marshall assessment. Downtown revitalization professionals with experience in each of the five components were selected to be on the Team. Through intensive communication during the visit, the Team attempted to build a coordinated and comprehensive set of recommendations.

Over the course of HandMade's four-year program, a cycle of success for building a revitalized community has emerged from learning by doing HandMade's Small Towns Project. Experience has demonstrated that seven critical factors blend to create a system that is effective, sustainable, and at times, nothing short of a miracle.

The cycle of success for building a revitalized community begins with *local motivation and commitment*. Without it, there is no need for a community to start their journey to renewal; if present, a *realistic community assessment* of the resources, hopes and desires of the whole community will spark a *plan for renewal* that sets the community in motion, giving focus to their work. As renewal projects are undertaken and completed according to community priority and pace, *key partnerships* develop and nurture a mutual support system that facilitates *early success and credibility* as well as long-term economic impact. As the cycle matures and citizens take on increasingly complicated community projects with the help of their key partners, the community as a whole gains an *increased capacity for leadership*. Citizens develop knowledge and skills that can then be shared with other towns and partners through mentorship – continued learning through doing, teaching, and reflection. The entire cycle is supported by a strong foundation of organization, essential for a community to “cycle through” over and over, at their own community rhythm, each time expanding their level of success.



Assessment Schedule and Content

The community and the Team spent an intensive two days together executing the visitation plans created by the revitalization committee. The team arrived in Marshall the morning of Thursday, July 22, 1999 and worked through the afternoon of Saturday, July 24, 1999. During the visit, an attempt was made to listen and talk to as many residents and business people as possible.

Through a whirlwind series of visits, the Team interviewed approximately 70 people. Approximately 30 curious citizens came to the Presbyterian Church for a lunch and heard the Team's final report. Various team members visited businesses from the by-pass to the core downtown area. Represented among the interviewees were breakfast eaters at Reggie's Cafe, business owners of many descriptions, public officials, property owners, bankers, farmers, civic leaders, Chamber of Commerce representatives, crafters, media, school officials, industrial plant managers, and innkeepers. A special attempt was made to involve senior citizens with a listening session at the Senior Center.

The Team also had the opportunity to sample local accommodations and cuisine. The Team stayed at the Marshall House Bed & Breakfast Inn and used the Town Hall and the Methodist Church as headquarters. Mealtime afforded the chance to taste the culinary talents of many Marshall cooks – from potlucks to the Rock Cafe. The Team learned a lot about Marshall in a short amount of time. Visits with merchants, a van tour around Marshall and environs, checking out downtown merchandise, and an evening at The Depot were highlights.

The combination of interacting with so many citizens and experiencing Marshall provided an effective way for the Team to quickly learn a large amount of material. This experience along with the expertise of the Team, and the interactions among the team members and participants blended together to create the stage upon which the 50 recommendations contained in this report are offered.

The Assessment Schedule can be found in the Appendix.

Marshal Your Forces, Marshall, and Go For It!

The revitalization process will only be successful if the model is extended beyond the Team visit and this report engenders active implementation. An important step in successful community development is building and engaging the collective will of the community. General consensus must exist that revitalization is a top community goal. Public/private support must be targeted in the same direction.

Another key to providing that focus is developing an organization of volunteers committed to seeing the process through its various developmental stages. This organization must ensure the right partners are brought and kept at the table; the community is informed as the process evolves; decisions are made in a rational way using best practice solutions; and resources are generated to implement the plan. The lead organization must ensure that committees experience short-term victories, make long-term plans, and persevere until the long-term plans turn into lasting legacies.

A major objective of the Assessment Team was to energize the community through creating a vision, encouraging dialogue, and infusing hope and confidence that "it can be done." Using RIVER + RIDGE, RAIL + ROAD, and RICHES + ROOTS as a launching pad, hopes for the future can be connected to the past. With focus, supportive relationships, enthusiasm, and perseverance applied by the many talented people the Team encountered in Marshall, the community can "go for it" and win.



RIVER + RIDGE



RAIL + ROAD



RICHES + ROOTS