

Community Coaching Project

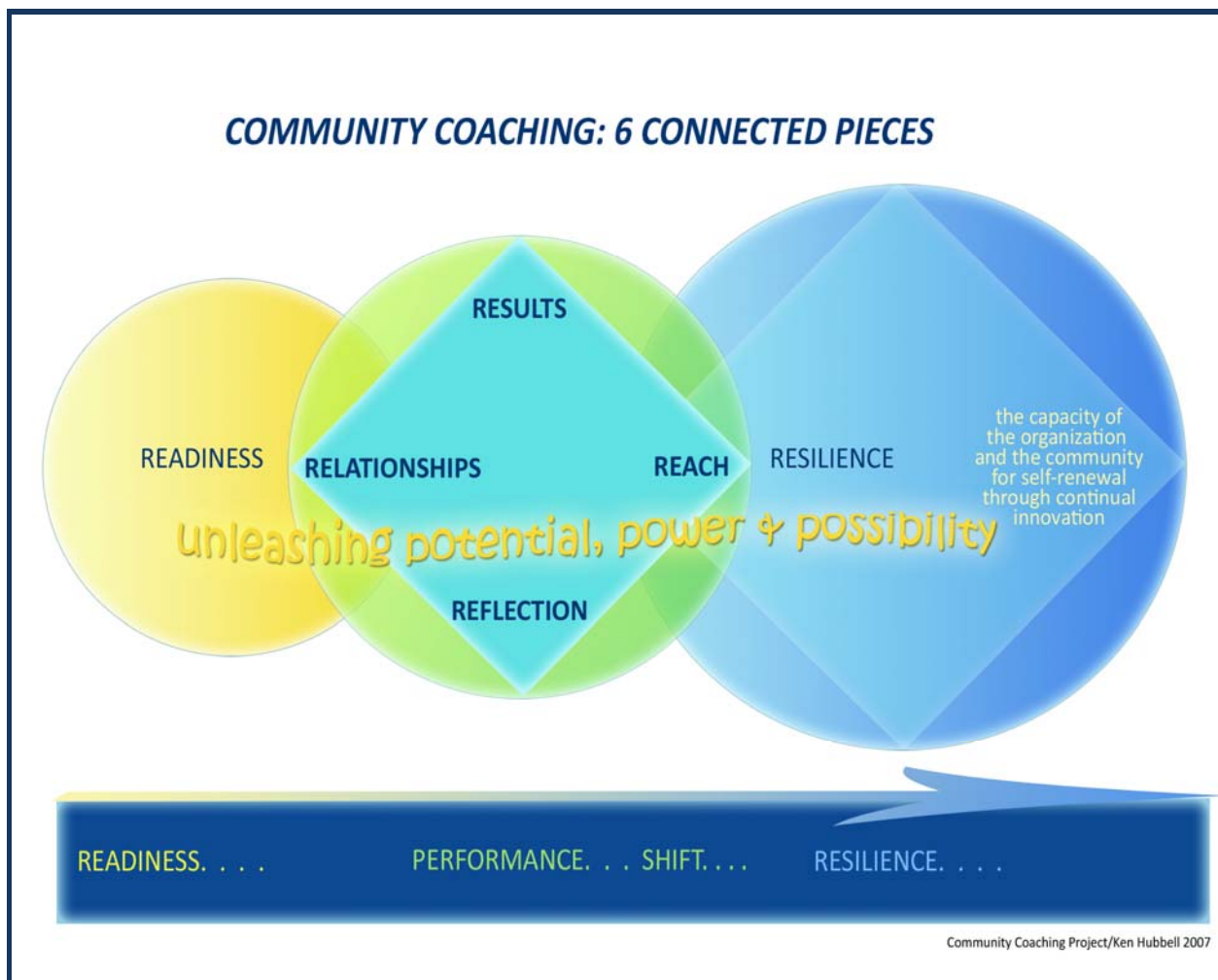
Making a case for building an international community of practice and developing useful resources to help people and organizations employ this approach to improve outcomes in community and to develop resilient organizations who serve communities.

Today, coaches work with more than athletes. Personal life coaches work with individuals; executive coaches work with leaders in the private and public sector; and community coaches work with local leaders and social change organizations. Working with a coach is a strategy to set goals, take action, make better decisions and develop natural strengths.

Successful coaching is not formulaic; successful coaches understand intuitively and concretely that there is no one size that fits all. Each community is unique, and each community must discover and nurture that uniqueness as they build capacity and get things done. Successful coaches also focus on outcomes, but not at the expense of process. They are attuned to the need for balance. These coaches approach their task with an eye to the hoped for ripple effect of their work in capacity building; they strive for the time when the synergy of coaching and capacity building becomes part of the community's way of learning together. They hope to see individual capacity gains reflected in those of the team and subsequently in the community. The successful coach models this synergy by looking forward to new learning from every new encounter with the community and the team. Thus, coaches ready to succeed focus on expanding their own understanding and reservoir of resources as they work with others to increase the capacity of participants and the overall community.

A Basic Architecture for Community Coaching: 6 Rs

We offer a simple concept as a framework for this kind of coaching: "The 6Rs of Community Coaching for Change." Coaching for community change helps groups move from any state of Readiness to strong states of Performance, and ultimately to a state of Resilience where they can sustain high performance through continual innovation. The coaching effort is highly collaborative and fits into four integrated categories: relationships, results, reflection, and reach. So our operating framework for the practice of community coaching is the dynamic interplay of four domains or disciplines that a coach fuses to the community work in collaboration with the groups she is coaching.



There are seasons and cycles around some or all of these domains when a coach is working with a group. Coaches and community participants have natural affinities for one or more of the "Rs," thus individuals bring both a predisposition and a mindset to the work of change. On any given team you will have some people who frame the work of change through a lens of relationships, and others who are results oriented. This is what makes the practice of coaching an art rather than a technique, as the coach helps generate clarity, alignment and a sense of shared purpose or commitment within the change process.

Coaching to Strengthen Teams and Relationships

Helping communities create and support new and lasting relationships is often at the core of coaching. A significant focus of community change coaching revolves around expanding who sits at the table and building new relationships with disenfranchised populations. Coaches help create places for safe dialog about divisive issues and develop consensus and commitment. They also assist teams in accessing opportunities to use, develop and respect the gifts and talents that are present in the community. Successful coaches build the capacity to trust, share leadership and partner.

Coaching to Trigger Results

Coaches ask thoughtful questions that help groups identify the barriers or thinking ruts that keep them from making progress and capitalizing on opportunities. Coaches bridge the gap between the funders and the communities in ways that reinforce the communities' ability to make progress toward its goals. Coaches clarify goals, help identify critical action steps and milestones, access resource possibilities, and monitor the pace of the community's change efforts.

Coaching to Frame Reflection

Coaching for reflection plays a critical role in the ability of groups to move from 'being stuck in the rut' to seeing the possibilities on the horizon. Among the important inputs coaches can add to successful reflection include the ability to create an environment where people are comfortable with a variety of vocabularies. Coaches help level the playing field so all can participate in reflective activities. Coaches can create openings for understanding progress, developing the consensus for change, appreciating the expected and the unexpected, using evidence, weaving stories, and initiating new ways for group and individual learning.

Coaching to Expand Reach and Reframe Possibilities

Coaches provide a clear focus on where a group wants to go and to reach out into the community to engage more diverse and unheard voices. Coaches can help reveal the hidden dimensions of social problems and engage people in a search for what is not known. Coaches encourage groups to create capacity, sustain the passion and action while creating higher levels of individual self awareness that lead to transforming the mindset of the entire team. Coaches can help groups reframe their work and systems to spur innovation and revitalization.

How Coaching Adds Value to Community Building Strategies

Coaching is a valuable nutrient and catalytic agent to any group efforts that require innovative ideas, shared leadership or participation, and comprehensive or integrative approaches across boundaries and economic sectors. Effective coaching, alone among other strategic approaches, provides the gestalt and enabling environment for collaboration, problem-solving, and shared learning for the common good or creating positive futures.

Coaching is an extremely effective tool for helping groups reframe their operating systems, unleash new ideas, transition to new leadership, and negotiate partnerships. Most of these are critical competencies for successful community building.

Coaching Creates These 7 Outcomes

1. Communities used new ways to live and work together.
2. Community teams uncovered new ideas that led to successful community change.
3. People came to see the reality of different perspectives, so they could work with others more effectively, reduce conflict, and create the conditions for a learning community.
4. Leaders included the whole community rather than a select few or the traditional elite.
5. Groups successfully challenged the status quo.
6. Community groups were able to generate self-direction - to decide for themselves what will work, how and why.
7. The group found a way to get unstuck and connect or reconnect their strategic work to their vision.

We counted at least 31 communities in 26 states as well as one community in Australia that are involved in coaching according to respondents of the survey. Adding in the results of the 2005 Coaching Roundtable survey, coaching is taking place or has been provided in over 250 communities in at least 37 states, distributed equally across the country.

The organizations involved in coaching include large foundations, government programs, and local groups such as community arts groups. The activities where these coaches are providing support range from board development, economic revitalization, civic engagement, helping low income women become financially independent, community planning, and encouraging organizational collaboration. The coaches have goals of helping groups generate improvement in the areas of employment, education, poverty-reduction, housing, environmental enhancement, business development, economic renewal and leadership development.

Building the Resources to Support the Field

The Community Coaching Project is designed to build and support the field of coaching for community and organizational change. It is in its second phase, and is being catalyzed by a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The lead agency for this phase of the effort is the North Central Rural Development Center at Iowa State University, one of seven national “centers” affiliated with the USDA Extension network. Design partners include Ken Hubbell & Associates and Jennifer Henderson/Strategic Interventions, independent consulting firms that use coaching in their work of community building.

Guiding Principles and Values of the Project's Coordinating Design Partnership.

The community coaching project evolved as a collaborative and highly creative project among more than twenty experienced coaches who consider themselves *stewards* of the emerging art of community coaching. Thus, this continuation builds upon earlier work of many practitioners. We work with an “open source” paradigm, encouraging users and partners to add new value to the emerging resource guide. We are working on a “brand” of community coaching that committed practitioners and partner groups can use and adapt, with the understanding that all new content around community coaching be made broadly available wherever possible .

The key steps for 2007-2009 will help build a supporting environment for community coaching.

1. Collect current knowledge from practitioners about practices, outcomes, critical resources and needs to build practitioner capacity;
2. Engage coach-practitioners and academic allies in shaping a learning curriculum for increasing mastery in basic and advanced coaching approaches;
3. Engage a diverse set of coach practitioners in creating a Guidebook to Community Coaching. This would be built around the six R's of Coaching and through short case studies, reflections on best practices would describe how coaching generated some of the seven examples cited here. This Guide would be linked to a versatile online resource center;
4. Engage partner groups to design and implement a rigorous evaluation of coaching outcomes and learnings from a set of at least twenty communities and the principal organizations that used coaching in their change efforts since 2000;
5. Develop a network or learning exchange among current coaches and establish some “home bases” to support the network by providing learning and training events, conferences, convenings, libraries, searchable databases, “wiki” resources on the art and practice of coaching for community change, etc.

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