



Visions from the Heartland December 2015

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Save the Date!

Jackson Hole Institute
October 11-13, 2016
Snow King Resort
Jackson, Wyoming

Watch for more details soon!



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[30th Anniversary Activities](#)

Heartland Center Celebrating 30th Anniversary in 2016-2017



Over the next two years, the Heartland Center will be celebrating its 30th anniversary with two significant events—returning to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 2016 for our annual institute and publishing the 4th edition of our book, *Clues to Rural Community Survival*,

in 2017.

The Heartland Center was incorporated in 1986, building on a successful, short-term project that was designed to lift the hopes of small town leaders during the Farm Crisis of the mid-1980s. That short-term project, called Visions from the Heartland, sponsored a series of workshops around the state of Nebraska for rural leaders whose communities were severely impacted by depressed prices for both agricultural land and farm commodities.

Headlines sparked fear by predicting that, as an example, a town less than 50 miles from the Interstate Highway could not survive to the end of the century. Or that communities had to be larger than some "magic" size to retain viability. Or surrounded by the "right" kind of natural amenities.

The founders of the Heartland Center had a contrary view, namely that it would make sense to find communities that were considered unlikely to survive, according to the "conventional wisdom," but that were doing so anyway, despite the odds. Acting on those instincts, the Center's founders organized the series of workshops and a regional conference to focus on the opportunities that abound, even in times of disruptive change. These programs were well received, and their aftermath included the decision to start a new organization to focus more attention on elements of success in rural community development.

A Steering Committee that had overseen the Visions from the Heartland project formed the basis for the Heartland Center's founding Board of Directors, and the Heartland Center was up and running.

Meanwhile, the Center's founding co-directors, Vicki Luther and Milan Wall, led a research project to identify communities that were succeeding despite tough times. Dr. Luther and Mr. Wall designed a research protocol to identify target communities for the initial round of research. The protocol combined quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Focusing originally just on communities in Nebraska, five small towns were selected. They ranged in size from 500 to 5000 and were dispersed widely throughout the state.

Research teams were sent into those five communities with an interview guide. Team members began by interviewing positional leaders, then opinion leaders and, finally, residents at random. On their return, Luther and Wall poured over the interviewers' notes and wrote journalistic-type case studies of each of the five

communities. Then they invited a group of reflective thinkers to review the case studies and to synthesize the key lessons that those case studies suggested.

The result was the first version of "20 Clues to Rural Community Survival," a list that has resonated with small town leaders and rural community developers ever since. The list has been refined slightly since it was first published but remains essentially the same. For the latest version, [click here](#).

About the Heartland Center

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development is an independent nonprofit organization developing local leadership that responds to the challenges of the future. The Heartland Center is headquartered in Lincoln, Nebraska.

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