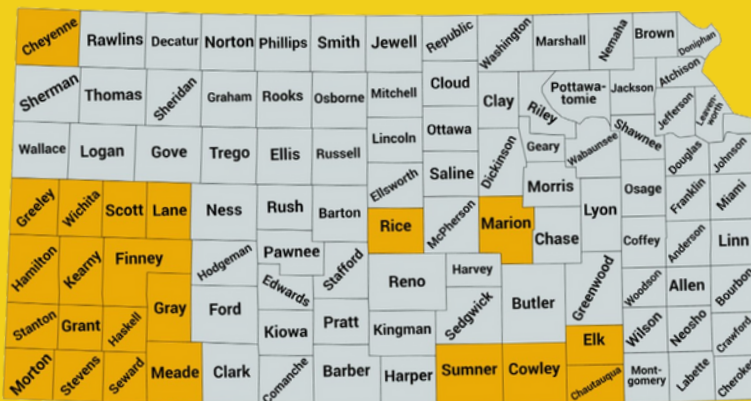




Overview of the Project

This project officially launched in September 2021 and involved five Kansas community foundation teams:

- The counties served by these community foundations are highlighted in the Kansas map below.



Year 1 of the project was a Learning Collaborative, allowing members of the community foundation teams to learn about the SDGs and how other community foundations have incorporated them in their work. Year 2 was a Community of Practice, with the teams focusing in on how they wanted to implement the SDG framework in their communities.



Year 1: Learning Collaborative Sessions

The first year of the experiment was designed to allow community foundation teams to focus on learning more about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how they have been operationalized by other community foundation across the globe. The learning sessions during Year 1 included:

- **September 2021** (Session 1): Tony Pipa of the Brookings Institution gave an overview of the value of the SDGs for community foundations. Greg Wagner of the West Central Initiative in Minnesota shared their journey for implementing SDGs at their foundation and provided recommendations for moving forward.
- **October 2021**: At the Annual National Conference for Growing Community Foundations, James Magowan of the European Community Foundation Initiative and Sarah Owen of Collaboratory (a community foundation in southwest Florida) introduced the “Whole of Organization Approach” to implementing the SDGs and asked participants to consider the opportunities and challenges of engaging in this process.
- **February 2022** (Session 2): Canadian community foundation partners Aaron McRann and Chris Willard shared different approaches to the work in their communities.
- **April 2022** (Session 3): European foundation partners Mariacristina Morsellino from Sicily and Michelle Cooper of the United Kingdom gave practical advice related to the lessons they have learned from embedding the SDGs into their work.

At the end of Year 1, each of the teams participated in a focus group style conversation to discuss the key lessons they learned during the year, to share any thoughts or concerns they had going into the second year, and to request any information or support that might be helpful to them.

**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS**





Key Findings - Year 1

1

The community foundation teams **appreciated having a year to build a foundation of knowledge about the SDGs**. They were able to learn about the SDG framework, become familiar with the language of the SDGs (and how to use that language in their community), and think through **how to connect the SDGs to their local, rural context**.

2

Community foundations can - and should - be catalysts and change agents in their communities. This is where they believe transformation is possible. Community foundations are able to see unmet needs in the community and can be the bridge between donor interests and community needs. And the SDGs can be a way to help frame that conversation.

3

The community foundation teams **valued learning from others** - from other community foundations around the world, from the other Kansas community foundation teams participating in this work, and from the other members of their team. This gave them the opportunity to **learn** new concepts, **discuss** them with others, and then think through how to **apply** them locally.

4

Team members mentioned the realization that **they are not alone in this work**. They are not alone in working to apply the SDGs, and they are not alone in trying to address these issues in their communities. **The needs they see and the challenges they face in their communities are not unique; the struggles are the same, here and in other places around the world**.



Year 2: Community of Practice Sessions

What is a Community of Practice?

We define a community of practice as an informal space for people with diverse experiences and skills who share a similar profession and/or passion to learn from each other, discussing ways to make their work better and build a sense of community among members of the group. In this case, the community foundation teams were all focused on integrating the SDGs into their work. The goal was for them to learn from one another about what was working well (and what wasn't) and to get ideas and support from each other on how to make progress on their goals. The Year 2 community of practice sessions included:

- **September 2022** (Session 1): This first session focused on revisiting the purpose of a community of practice and reviewing the key lessons learned from the first year. Teams were also given the opportunity to discuss what else they thought they might need to move from the theory of Year 1 to the action/application of Year 2.
- **October 2022**: The community foundation teams participated in a session at the Annual National Conference for Growing Community Foundations. This session, titled "Creating Community Foundation Connections with the SDGs," was co-presented with Welcoming America and explored the SDG framework, the practices of Welcoming America, and the journeys of community foundations that are putting these ideas into practice.
- **February 2023** (Session 2): During this session, the teams were asked to share something they wanted to celebrate that had happened since the previous session and then engage in a group consultation process that allowed them to present a challenge their team was facing and receive feedback from the other teams. After hearing from their peer communities, teams were then asked to identify at least one strategy they were willing to try prior to the next session.
- **May 2023** (Session 3): Teams were able to share updates and celebrations related to their SDG work. There was also time devoted to hearing about a national SDG Roundtable hosted by Collaboratory in March 2023 and having conversation around some of the questions that were asked by those in attendance at the roundtable.

In addition to the Community of Practice sessions, each team was also given the opportunity to work with a coach to help make progress on their SDG priorities.

At the end of Year 2, each of the teams participated in a focus group style conversation to talk about facilitators and barriers/challenges experienced during the implementation/community of practice year as well as what advice they would give to other community foundations wanting to move toward implementing the SDG framework.



Key Findings - Year 2

1

All of the community foundation teams expressed their **gratitude for being selected to be part of this experiment**. Everyone was thankful to have been invited to participate and given the opportunity to see what they might be able to do with this focus and these funds. One team expressed that it was nice to hear someone saying, **"We see you out there. That little bit of encouragement is what we needed."**

2

\$10,000 isn't a lot, but it's enough - and it goes a long way in a small/rural community. Several of the teams mentioned that while \$10,000 doesn't seem like much money, \$10,000 goes farther in a small/rural community than it does in a larger one. It doesn't take much money to make a difference. One team added, "With that being said, without the \$10,000, we probably wouldn't have done it. It was a small amount, but enough of an incentive."

3

Don't get discouraged - or at least don't stay discouraged for too long. The teams recognize that it can be easy to get overwhelmed by "the periodic table of the SDGs" and that at first, it can feel like too much, especially when all of the SDGs are important. While the SDGs are well thought out, they can be a lot to take in. Teams were proud of their persistence, in sticking with this experiment from beginning to end - from the learning through the implementation.

4

Coaches were key. A number of the community foundations teams talked about how beneficial it was to have a coach. Coaches were able to help the teams think through various elements of their projects and make connections to additional resources to help move their projects forward.



Overall Lessons Learned

1. As was emphasized at the end of Year 1 and again at the end of Year 2, **an important realization was that they are not alone in this work**. When looking at the SDGs, they realized that we are all struggling with the same things – here in our state, nationally, and globally. One team said, “To see the work that other foundations are doing here and around the world...it shows us the possibilities. The opportunities are out there. Some community foundations are bigger than we are, but it shows us what’s possible.”
2. **There have been unexpected ripple effects in these communities** as a result of the intentional work these community foundation teams have done over the last two years. Teams talked about seeing an increase in community pride and an overall improvement in community attitudes. Other people in the community have engaged in the work, and there is momentum to continue moving forward.
3. **The SDGs are another tool in the toolbox**. Sometimes the SDG language can be used to make connections between local work and other efforts, and **sometimes the language of sustainability may not resonate in rural communities**. The framing may need to be around sustaining rural communities or leaving a legacy for future generations. The teams are being intentional about using the language internally and using discretion on when they use the language externally.
4. **Now that they’ve learned about the SDGs, they see them all around**. Two teams had members who saw signs for the SDGs while they were visiting other countries. Another team member mentioned seeing an app on their phone for the SDGs, which highlights the work the company that makes the phone is doing to make progress on the SDGs.





Recommendations for Future Experiments

1. **The most helpful part of the Kansas experiment was by far the connections that were made** – connections with other community foundations in the state and around the world. These connections helped them learn with and from one another as well as provide support to each other. In addition, the coaches were a critical part of the experience. **Keeping the cohort model and the access to a coach** can help facilitate some of the learning, networks, and connections that were so beneficial to community foundations in this work.
2. While it wasn't a lot of money, **the \$10,000 was a make or break component of the experiment**. It was just enough of an incentive for the teams to feel like they could take this on. One team said, "We are really grateful for the funding. It has made a significant difference in our community. \$10,000 feels so small, but it's a big deal here." **Providing a small incentive for participation** should be a consideration for future experiments.
3. The community foundation teams appreciated **having the first year to gain additional knowledge and a deeper understanding of the SDGs** and to hear from other community foundations on they how have implemented them. At the end of Year 2, the teams were still talking about the presentation from Michelle Cooper of the United Kingdom. Michelle connected the SDGs to the rural context and talked about how to keep the SDGs simple, streamlined, and easy to understand.
4. While the community foundation teams **appreciated the flexibility of being able to decide what would work best for them, they also would have liked a little more direction**. They were grateful to not have the work dictated or prescribed, but there was also some frustration in not quite knowing what to do. **Some guidance and additional examples of possible pathways forward would have been welcomed**.





Community Foundation Profile: *Bird City Century II Development Foundation*

Located in Cheyenne County

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



Project Description

Bird City Century II Development Foundation has known for several years that they wanted to focus on housing. This project helped them continue to solidify their plans and move forward with addressing housing in their community, including building a brand new home - one of the first new homes built in their community since the 1970s. See pictures of their first house here:

https://www.zillow.com/homes/214-W-4th-St-Bird-City,-KS-67731_rb/91106611_zpid/

Link to their video: <https://vimeo.com/872126121>

Key Lessons Learned

- One of the key lessons the Bird City team learned was that these types of projects take time. Building relationships, making a plan, moving things forward - none of that happens overnight. It takes time to make something work. It is also possible to have a dynamite game plan and still fail, but learning what doesn't work eventually leads you to what does.
- They learned they are not alone in what they are dealing with in their community; other communities are facing the same challenges they are facing in Bird City.
- The SDGs fit into a lot of different projects (and a lot of different projects fit into the SDGs). As they look at new projects in the future, they can ask themselves, "How does that fit into the SDGs?"

Most Helpful Part of the Experiment

- The most beneficial part of the experiment - and it has definitely been an experiment! - was networking and connecting with people and foundations all over world. It was also beneficial to connect with the other community foundation teams. Prior to this, the Bird City team didn't know another community foundation working on housing, and now they have connected with at least one other community foundation in Kansas that is also working on housing which has allowed them to talk about what they are doing and get feedback and encouragement from one another.
- Connecting with others is also a reminder that no one has to reinvent the wheel; they can take what others are doing and tweak it. Their work may not be identical, but they can change 'X' or 'Y' and make something work for them. They are able to learn and then make adjustments as needed to best fit their community.



Community Foundation Profile: *Bird City Century II Development Foundation*

Located in Cheyenne County

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



Proud Moments

- They are most proud of their persistence. Because of their follow through, they now have two homes on the ground - one completed and one well on its way to completion. They have physical structures that people can see. There have been five new homes built in the last year, which is a big deal for their small community.
- This project helped jumpstart strategies that they have been talking about for a long time. This helped move them to action. They are working to find new answers to questions and challenges that have been present in their community for a while.
- They have been pleasantly surprised by the positive byproducts that have happened as a result of this project. They just wanted to build a house in the community - and they did - but now neighbors have started to fix up their homes. Storefronts are starting to look better along main street. While it wasn't expected, this project has re-energized widespread community pride.

Challenges

- When they started their housing initiative, BCCII wanted to bring together the Foundation, the City, and the major employers in town to work on the issue together, but they found that everyone had their own ideas about how to approach the issue. Some were not interested in working with anyone else on the issue. While they were able to find some common ground, they also encountered a number of barriers.
- Right now, BCCII believes the easiest part of the process is complete - the building of a house. All of the research and work they put in prior to that was more difficult (not to mention making housing design decisions - like choosing the color of the door handles - as a group of 5). As they complete the first house and put it on the market and then work on putting their second house on the market, the team worries that they are not doing it at the best possible time. Interest rates are up. New houses cost more to build. While the house is priced to break even, the price tag on it is a shock to people in their rural community. How do they sell these houses to the families who need them?
- Everything stops with the dollar, and housing is a big and expensive issue to try to tackle. In addition, in a rural area, there is a certain amount of coordination that has to happen to get things done. For example, there is one person who does concrete work in the area, and they have to coordinate the work with that person's schedule and availability.



Community Foundation Profile: *Bird City Century II Development Foundation*

Located in Cheyenne County

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



Advice to Others

- Don't get discouraged or at least don't stay discouraged for too long. Keep moving. Exciting things are ahead! You will have success, or you will learn something along the way. Celebrate the small wins. BCCII is two years into this project and finally seeing results. Keep being persistent!
- You have to do what works for your Foundation and for your community. There is no one right way to do this, and it will be different from community to community. Everyone is starting from a different place and will take a different path, and that's ok.
- Find someone who is similar - community size, asset size, etc. - and just a bit ahead of where you want to be and what you are trying to do. Find someone who has already tackled what you are trying to tackle to hear about their results and learn from their work. That resource may help you think of something in a new way or try something that you hadn't thought of before.
- If you're not sold on the SDGs yet, just give it more time. Try to understand them. Hearing about others' projects and how they have applied the SDGs - successfully or unsuccessfully - is helpful. Even without success, there is learning to be had. Even now, the team is working to wrap their brains around everything. The SDGs help keep their thoughts and steps organized: What is the focus for this project? For the foundation? For the community?

Suggestions for Future Experiments

- Have more of a central line of communication along with a contact who could help identify grants or other funding opportunities partners would be eligible for and which might help support the work they are doing. If the partners aren't eligible for a funding opportunity, who in the community might be? How might they partner with them or at least let them know about the opportunity? Housing is an expensive endeavor and finding ways to increase the incentive to be involved and bring in others to support this work will be important.
- Help teams better explore what might be lacking and/or needed most in their community. Then help them identify ways to share that information more broadly in the community. How can more people be brought in to support projects like this?
- Keep rural communities in mind for these opportunities. There are people out there working hard to make a difference, and the little bit of encouragement provided through this project was "what we needed to hear at the time. I really thought no one was listening to us, but people recognized what we are trying to do out here."



Community Foundation Profile:

Legacy Regional Community Foundation

Located in Cowley County



Project Description

Legacy Regional Community Foundation developed a data walk focused on Cowley County kids and how poverty impacts their health, education, and potential for success in the future. The data walk events allowed community members to learn more about issues impacting young children in Cowley County and think about how they might get involved. Learn more at:

<https://www.legacyregionalfoundation.org/apply-for-funding/cowley-kids/cowley-kids-data>.

Link to their video: <https://vimeo.com/872130036>

Key Lessons Learned

- Community foundations are change agents in their community – not just in growing funds for the community, but in working closely with the community and helping to shape the community. “We might be small, and we might be rural, but we can be a catalyst in our community!” Community foundations are experienced in working with donors on their interests, but they can also work to educate donors on the needs of the community. Community foundations often see the needs of the community in an up close and personal way and can connect donors to those needs.
- One of the most valuable lessons was bringing the team together to learn more about what other community foundations are doing and to have conversations about how their community foundation could move in that direction. They gained a better understanding of the SDGs, why it makes sense to use that model, and how to apply the SDGs in their community. This project provided a platform to initiate these types of conversations with both their board and with the community.
- Anytime you get a group together, you will put forth your best effort and then evolve as needed. The Legacy RCF team like the purpose, the direction, and the intent of the project, and they also recognize that there will be changes along the way as they bring different people into the process.

Most Helpful Part of the Experiment

- Listening to the other community foundations was instrumental for Legacy RCF. It was helpful to hear from other community foundations experiencing success in utilizing the SDGs from across the globe and demonstrating the path of moving through the SDGs. The presentation from Great Britain was particularly impactful.



Community Foundation Profile:

Legacy Regional Community Foundation

Located in Cowley County



Most Helpful Part of the Experiment Continued

- The \$10,000 was a critical component of the project; this allowed Legacy RCF to leverage additional grant dollars to help make progress on the issues they identified. Their project – the data walk – made a great impact on the community. The funding also allowed Legacy RCF to bring in a speaker from the Kansas Health Foundation, and the project helped community members see what they could do to be a part of efforts to address childhood poverty in the community. The project lit a fire under this team of folks and members of the community as well.
- Having a learning cohort was helpful, though they would have liked to be even more connected to the other Kansas community foundations in the cohort.

Proud Moments

- The group is proud of how their team was able to come together and act experimentally. While it was tempting to jump to a solution right away, they gave themselves the first year to focus on learning and then decide how best to move things forward in their community.
- There has been great participation in the data walks. They originally thought the data walk would be a one-time event, but they have done more than 25 events! In addition, the data are being used and referenced by others in the community. For example, a school used it as part of their accreditation process. Eighth graders used it as a service-learning project, going through the data walk process just as the adults did and then coming up with ideas for what they could do to have an impact.
- The data walks raised a lot of awareness of the challenges in the community and showed how interconnected they are. The data helps move people toward productivity and away from finger-pointing and placing blame. People are able to look at their work in the context of something larger.
- Legacy was contacted by the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, and they are now highlighted as one of three case studies that will be used for teaching. Legacy is the rural case study. Indiana University used/tested the case studies in a class in the spring of 2023.

Challenges

- While a lot of folks saw an immediate benefit to bringing people together around this issue, there are still some pivotal community members that are not yet on board; they are content to go on doing things as they have always been done. This has been a frustration and an obstacle, but it is also just the reality of doing work in (and with) the community.



Community Foundation Profile:

Legacy Regional Community Foundation

Located in Cowley County



Advice for Others

- Have a team and have a mentor! The group expressed gratitude for the team they had in place for this project. They also said that having a peer community foundation in a similarly sized community that has successfully walked through this would be really beneficial.
- Good work brings more good work, so be prepared for that. With more than 1,000 people participating in over 25 data walks, this project has informed the community and begun to move the needle and shift the culture of the community. They are grateful for the project and the momentum it has brought, and they are excited about their role (and their leadership) in continuing to move this work forward in their community.
- Meet people where they are. At the mention of the United Nations, some eyes will perk up and some eyes will glaze over. This is about the ideas and the framework, but also interpreting it all in a way that makes sense for your community. Internally, they use SDG language at the community foundation. Publicly, they are more selective in using the SDG language.
- The team found it frustrating at the beginning, not knowing exactly what to do. The design of this opportunity was a “go slow to go fast” approach, with time at the beginning for learning and space available to discover what might work best for each community.

Suggestions for Future Experiments

- The Legacy team felt like this experiment was transformational for their community foundation. People beyond their own board members are now connected to the community foundation and are proactively and creatively thinking about how to be change agents in the community. They hope that KACF, the Mott Foundation, and others will continue to connect Kansas community foundations with these kinds of opportunities.
- The program design/model for this was great. One suggestion was to consider having half as many community foundations to learn from and then be able to interact with them more. They appreciated having the time set aside for learning, but there was a lot to learn, and it took time to process all of it. They thought it would be helpful to have the presentation with time for questions (as was done), and then come back to the same presenter at a later date for additional interaction, giving the teams and the cohort time to process and think about what was learned.
- Another idea was to have an assignment to look at one or more of the SDGs in their community in a deeper way, having teams pull the SDGs into the local context right away. For example, taking SDG 1: No Poverty. What does poverty look like in the community? Who is working on it? What data are available? Provide a template or a worksheet to help teams think through the SDGs in their community in a more guided/structured way. As the team said, “We don’t know what we don’t know.” This would help them figure out what they don’t know.



Project Description

Housing has been an issue in Peabody for decades. The continual question in the community has been which to focus on first – businesses or housing. This project and the SDGs finally forced a focus, and the Peabody Community Foundation zeroed in on housing, establishing a land bank and fixing up homes in their community.

Link to their video: <https://vimeo.com/872141477>

Key Lessons Learned

- For some people, the global connection of the SDGs is exciting and for others less so. They are learning to live with the tension of using the SDG language in some settings and not in others and in knowing all of the SDGs are connected, but their focus is going to be on only one or two.
- The SDGs can be a way to tie into a larger community and the resources available there. They provide a way to look at an overall community and assess what's going on, and the language can connect different communities across a variety of issues.
- The Peabody team spent time talking to people in the community, learning more about the current situation related to housing and what people would like to see. Most people were really interested in the topic and had a lot to say. As a result, they learned more about Peabody and what people think is needed in the community.
- Learning about what other countries and communities are doing was helpful. After listening to other community foundations talk about the different ways they have implemented the SDGs in their programs and their work, they realized they could pick and choose the ideas that would work best for them in Peabody.
- It's all about the connections! How many connections can be made to help make progress on this issue?

Most Helpful Part of the Experiment

- Having a coach who knows what they're doing and who is helpful and accessible and has an abundance of experience was tremendously helpful. Connecting with a coach early on was a critical component for them.
- Seeing the work that other community foundations are doing here in Kansas and around the world showed them the possibilities that exist. The opportunities are out there. Some might be bigger than what will work in Peabody, but it demonstrates what's possible.



Proud Moments

- The team they had in place at the beginning of the project is still in place after two years.
- This project has made a difference in the overall community attitude. They focused in on housing, which is something people can see in the community: "When I say I work for the foundation, I can also say our focus is on housing. It's been easier to have something tangible to explain what the foundation is doing in town. This has the potential to be a real game changer." People can also see the synergy between this project and other projects in the community. Peabody is moving, there is good energy, and this project has been a significant part of that.
- They are proud of their work as a convener around an important issue in their community and feel like this is something that could create visible and lasting change in their community. The team wants people to think, "This is a good small community I could see myself living in," and they are on their way to making that happen.

Challenges

- One of Peabody Community Foundation's challenges is a lack of staff; they have just one part-time staff person, and they can only go so far with volunteers. In addition, in small communities, it tends to be the same volunteers working on various projects throughout the community. They want to incorporate more people into the work so these volunteers don't burn out and so there is broad ownership of the work in the community.
- For rural communities, funding is always a challenge. The team feels that people don't have a clue what is available in rural communities; it's not millions of dollars. It is a continual fight to get funding, and having just \$10,000 from this project was so helpful. While \$10,000 may seem small, it's a big deal in a community like Peabody.
- They applied for a Rural Champions grant and were not awarded, which was disappointing, but they are going to continue looking for additional funding opportunities.
- Some of the houses they are working on fixing up aren't family homes; they are homes for a single person or a couple, but they realize they have to start somewhere, and this is where they were able to start.



Advice for Others

- Get a coach!
- Spend time learning and really getting to know what's needed in your community. The Peabody team talked to more than 50 different stakeholders in the community during the first year of the project.
- In small communities, the process is slow. It takes time and you will make mistakes. Community patience will not be eternal, and things won't move as quickly as some people want. You have to keep plugging away and not get discouraged.
- Find a focus, and don't try to do too much. There is so much that needs to be done that you can get bogged down trying to do too much, especially in a small town. Maintaining focus is what gives the work staying power. Start small and agree to stay focused.

Suggestions for Future Experiments

- Having just a little bit of money to support this project made a huge difference for them. Providing seed money was a valuable component of this Kansas experiment.
- This project did a great job providing continual support and information to the community foundation teams and connecting them with each other as well as with other relevant agencies in the state. Additional information on possible grants and funding opportunities would be welcomed.
- What other rural places in the United States are implementing the SDG framework? They would love to connect with more people in rural areas who are working to implement the SDGs in their communities.



Project Description

The Rice County Community Foundation team had the idea that they wanted to start a young professionals program and a Leadership Rice County program, and then a meeting with their coach changed everything. Instead, they started Rise Up Rice County, with the goal of strengthening the social fabric of Rice County through increased dialogue, understanding, and the exchange of diverse perspectives. Learn more at: <https://www.riseupricecounty.com/>.

Link to their video: <https://vimeo.com/872143508>

Key Lessons Learned

- Becoming familiar with the SDGs and the framework was a foundational block they wanted in place before moving forward. The presentation from the woman in Great Britain particularly resonated with their group. She gave them permission to use language that makes sense for their community, and she clearly understood how to talk to people in rural areas. She provided practical and plain language to use. They felt like she helped them move from theory to practice and application.
- The needs and issues they see in their community aren't unique; other small towns have the same challenges, domestically and internationally. The structure of the SDGs can help frame the issues. Also, a lot of people are doing this work and just not using the language of the SDGs. How might the SDGs be incorporated into more spaces? How might this common language be used in more places?
- One of the Rice County team members went to the World Expo and noticed that all of the exhibits there were labeled with the SDG numbers; everything there was intentionally connected to the SDGs. We (here in Kansas and the United States) are behind on this.

Most Helpful Part of the Experiment

- The coaching piece was critical for them. They had planned a young professionals program and a leadership program, but their coach "blew that up, which was for the better; it made things better." Their coach helped them better understand what they were really hoping to do - increase dialogue and communication between communities and have people from different communities in the county talking to each other and working together to make progress on the issues in their county. If they can get people together to talk - just to talk - once they start talking, then they can start working on their problems together.



Most Helpful Part of the Experiment Continued

- Without the \$10,000, they probably would not have participated in this. Just that little bit of an incentive allowed them to prioritize this work and get community members involved.
- Being part of a cohort was helpful. They enjoyed getting to know the other groups and would have liked even more opportunities to interact with them.

Proud Moments

- They were excited and proud of the results of their first event for Rise Up Rice County – they had almost 70 people attend! Six of the eight communities in Rice County were represented (along with individuals from other counties as well). They visited a local site that contains petroglyphs and had an expert speak about them. There was a bonfire and s'mores. The team incorporated facilitation questions to start conversations: "The petroglyphs are marks made by those who were here many years ago. What would you like your mark to be?" The petroglyphs are on private property, so they had to have permission to visit them, which made this something special for Rice County. "People really enjoyed the event. I couldn't stop smiling."
- While they don't know exactly what this project will look like going forward, they know they want to unite their county for sustainable good. They want to create "pride of place" in Rice County, so people feel at home there even if they aren't originally from there. After the event, people in the community have a better idea of what Rise Up Rice County is and who the community foundation is, even if they don't know exactly what they do. This will hopefully keep them engaged and coming back for more.
- The Rice County team approached this project in an open way, with no expectations or projects in their back pocket. They dove in to learn and ask hard questions and struggle. "We wanted to do the learning justice. We flailed a bit. We did some actual hard work – we wanted to do this project justice." They were able to arrive at their project because they were open and listening to everything.

Challenges

- Initially, the team felt like they had no direction. They wanted to balance the learning and freedom of deciding what they wanted to do with some structure to help guide them. There are 17 different SDGs they could be working on, and they spent 18 months trying to figure out what to do. "It was like drinking out of a firehouse for a bit." Some additional guidance to help them hone in on something would have been welcome.



Challenges Continued

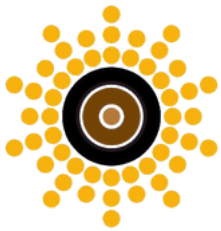
- Bandwidth is an issue. Everyone involved in this project is also involved in other projects in the community. In a small town, it is the same people doing the work across many different areas. They want to engage more people in this work so there is enough momentum for the long term and so this doesn't end up as just another project that eventually gets shelved. To keep this going will be the hardest part.
- Who else is utilizing the SDGs? Who else in Kansas is focused on the SDGs? How do these different groups find one another?

Advice for Others

- Continually bring it back to the SDGs. It can be easy to forget that, but make sure to bring the SDGs along. Keep the repetition so it becomes familiar. We can work to have the SDGs become the common language of community improvement and community initiatives.
- Don't make it overwhelming. When you use words like United Nations and Sustainable Development Goals, it can sound very academic and people worry it will be over their head, but this is work you are probably already doing; these are the challenges that everyone is facing. Remind yourself that, "It's not a thesis, it's just another tool in your toolbox."

Suggestions for Future Experiments

- The Rice County CF Team would have liked to have more time to learn about the SDGs themselves prior to learning about how community foundations have been applying them.
- The five community foundation teams had some interaction throughout the course of the two years, but Rice County would have liked to see even more interaction with the other teams. They wanted to get to know the other groups more and have additional opportunities to hear what others were doing and learn from one another.
- There has to be a balance between dictating the work and feeling like there isn't any direction. It was ok to not have a project initially, but trying to understand what they were doing was difficult. With most grants they receive, they have deliverables and a checklist of what they need to report back on; this opportunity wasn't like that. They know there isn't one right way to approach this, and they also would have liked some additional guidance in the process.



Project Description

The Western Kansas Community Foundation (WKCF) team hired a videographer to create a short video that highlights young adults who chose to move back or have decided to live in southwest Kansas. They want to show that life in a rural community can be a desirable choice. There are many reasons to choose rural, and this video highlights three individuals who share their stories about the decision to live in southwest Kansas. Check out their video here: <http://wkcf.org/our-work/realizing-rural-potential>

Link to their video: <https://vimeo.com/872145447>

Key Lessons Learned

- The WKCF team initially struggled with the SDGs and what to do with them; there are lots of SDGs and therefore lots of possibilities. They were trying to lead with the SDGs and then realized that they could lead with their work and the SDGs could follow, and this helped everything make more sense for them. It was easier to see how what they do fits with the SDGs rather than the other way around. The SDGs provided a new way to look at what they were already doing.
- As a foundation, WKCF was already making a shift from donor centric work to work that is focused more on community needs. The SDG framework can help inform the conversations they have with donors about community needs. The 17 SDGs cover all of the possible issues to address in a community, and as a result, the SDGs can help identify blind spots, where community need may be present but not as evident. WKCF sees tremendous potential for the SDGs as a framework and language for community foundations to use going forward.
- Rural communities don't necessarily like to hear the word "sustainability." WKCF has reframed the language to talk more about legacy instead of sustainability. What is our legacy? How are we building a community that will be good for our grandchildren? That is still language that connects to sustainability. In addition, the United Nations doesn't have the weight in rural communities that it might have in urban or metropolitan areas. The UN might be seen as negative or neutral at best, but it is not positive to mention in rural Kansas communities.
- The question isn't, "Do you want to use the SDGs?" The question is, "How do we develop a common framework to talk about what we are doing in a way that others understand?" The SDGs are the answer to that question. The SDGs provide a language and a framework to talk about the work and hone in on what is trying to be accomplished.



Most Helpful Part of the Experiment

- Hearing from other community foundations who are doing this work was helpful, especially the presentation from Great Britain. One team member said, "That was the best hour or hour and a half we spent together as a group."
- Walking through the process as a cohort was important. The teams were able to hear about what others were doing and learn from their efforts. Supporting each other in this work strengthened the experience and created opportunities for partnerships.

Proud Moments

- The WKCF team is proud of sticking with it through this project. They had a hard time getting started and figuring out what they wanted to do, but they persevered and ended up with a product that makes sense for their community, is marketable, and bigger than what they thought it would be.
- The narrative used to be that if you came back home to southwest Kansas, that meant you had failed. WKCF is changing that narrative: you can have success back home. You can choose that life, and you can make an impact here. We are growing, we are diverse, and we have opportunities for you here.
- Kansas is now on the cutting edge of the SDGs in the United States, and the community foundation teams working on this over the last two years have helped shape that. Rural communities are often the last adopters of things - like haircuts and music - but on this, they were able to be early adopters. The WKCF team appreciated the rural focus for this work because "when one rural community is successful, we are all successful."

Challenges

- WKCF serves 15 counties in southwest Kansas. These counties are all different. The rural western Kansas counties often get lumped together for interventions and programs when each of them actually has different needs and challenges they want to address. WKCF tries to pay attention to the differing needs of each community. In addition, the population in this part of the state is constantly changing, with different groups of people moving in and others moving out, so the community that is there today isn't the same as the one that will be there in 5 years. Interventions and initiatives have to evolve and change along with the population.



Challenges Continued

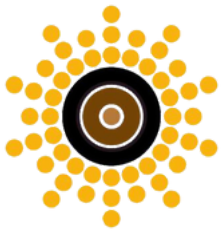
- The aspirational nature of the SDGs can sometimes be a challenge. For example, SDG 1 is No Poverty. The reality is that no one is likely to entirely erase poverty in their community – and certainly not by 2030. Recognize that the goal is progress rather than perfection.
- Capturing the transfer of wealth in this part of the state is a concern for WKCF. Every person who leaves takes their current and future dollars away from the community. As WKCF thinks about building long-term investments for the community, they want to encourage people to stay or move back. The video they developed through this project is one piece of their work to help recruit and retain the population in southwest Kansas.

Advice for Others

- Do what works for your community and then see how that ties in to the SDGs. For the WKCF team, that process was energizing, empowering, and inspirational.
- There has to be a data component to help communities see where they are on a particular issue and how they might improve in that area. Use data to help drive decisions and measure progress. For smaller communities and counties, getting data at the local (as opposed to regional) level can be a challenge, but don't let that stop you from doing the work.
- The SDGs are well thought out, but they are also a lot to take in and can feel overwhelming to think about in their entirety. Also, the SDG language doesn't come naturally to most people, so finding ways to use more plain language to describe them in the community can be beneficial. WKCF is using the SDG language internally and being more selective about using it externally.
- This project would not have worked without regular meetings. The WKCF team was able to work this into some of their other meetings, but having regular meetings with each other as well as with the cohort was important for the project.

Suggestions for Future Experiments

- A little more direction might be helpful. They recognized this project came with the freedom and flexibility to do what they thought was best for their community. While this encouraged creativity, it also created a bit of anxiety.



Suggestions for Future Experiments Continued

- Continue to create a cohort/network of teams working on this. The cohort model helped increase insights and generate additional lessons learned throughout the process.
- Providing recommended local data sources for communities to review connected to the SDGs would be helpful.
- The initial list of who should be part of the community foundation teams included donors. Bringing donors into the process that early may have been a mistake. It would be beneficial to have a little more clarity and direction prior to bringing in donors.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

