



# The Right Tools to Enhance Rural Vitality

Community  
Heart & Soul®

**Small towns have big assets. Their residents are leaders with the ingenuity, expertise and drive to build strong, vibrant communities.**

Our innovative community development model empowers rural residents to own the trajectory of their hometowns and drive decisions that improve the quality of life based on what matters most to them.

## Why It Matters

The national narrative around rural communities is that their populations are aging and shrinking while the global economy passes them by.

However, we know from working closely with rural residents that this narrative is false. Small towns are full of passionate people who want to roll up their sleeves and help their communities thrive — they just need the tools for driving community development.

Many residents face barriers to participating in this work and need to be brought into the conversation.

## Our Unique Role

Community Heart & Soul® is an initiative of the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, which has a long history of building trusted relationships across rural Northeast Iowa.

By bringing together diverse groups of people — including those who aren't typically at the table — we facilitate solutions to critical challenges facing our rural region. By analyzing data about local communities, we can connect the dots between issues like rural quality of life, economic development and academic achievement, and work collaboratively toward holistic solutions.

Additionally, we amplify the power of rural philanthropy, bridging the generosity of caring community members and the most critical needs of the region.

## How It Works

The Heart & Soul process is driven by small-town residents. As facilitators, we draw on a set of guiding principles to help them focus on their communities' assets and issues that matter most to them to drive local decision-making and investment.

## Our Accomplishments

- Worked with leaders in Iowa and Illinois to complete and implement Heart & Soul programs in nine communities
- Empowered community members in Monticello, Iowa, to identify education as a key quality of life indicator and ultimately pass a school bond issue
- Created a network of Heart & Soul practitioners across five Midwest states that meets quarterly to discuss best practices and share successes and challenges around rural vitality
- Served as the basis for other Community Foundation rural vitality initiatives that draw on Heart & Soul principles, including:
  - Regional Roundtable, which brings together leaders from rural communities to share ideas and work together to address community challenges
  - Rural Equity Network, a peer cohort that helps rural leaders understand systemic racism and how to build welcoming and inclusive communities

# Get Involved



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