COMMUNITY HEART & SOUL

FAQ

**What is Community Heart & Soul®?**

Community Heart & Soul is a community development model that builds stronger, healthier, and more economically vibrant small cities and towns. Community Heart & Soul® is a catalyst for positive change that guides a community in making the best decisions about its future.

Developed for small cities and towns (less than 50,000 population), the model actively seeks the collective wisdom of all residents, including those whose voices are often missing. The model helps build trust while taking into account the unique character of a town and the deep emotional connection of the people who live there—a town’s “Heart & Soul®.” These collective insights, called Heart & Soul Statements, reflect what truly matters most to residents and guide a community in making the best decisions about its future.

Community Heart & Soul:

* actively seeks the collective wisdom of all residents, including those whose voices are often missing;
* helps build trust among individuals, groups, and organizations;
* takes into account the unique character of a town;
* recognizes the deep emotional connection of the people who live there; and
* leads to decisions based on what matters most.

**What benefits can be expected?**

Community Heart & Soul has helped towns strengthen economies, increase community involvement, build leadership, bridge divides, and get groups to work together. With greater involvement and groups working better together, local government can see more clearly how to use resources effectively and sharpen budgets. And Community Heart & Soul leaves a lasting legacy, a way of doing business that helps towns meet challenges in the future and make decisions based on what matters most to everyone. [Visit Orton.org to view success stories from Heart & Soul towns.](https://www.orton.org/success-stories/)

**Why should my town embark on a Community Heart & Soul project?**

Community Heart & Soul is a proven model that’s built for small towns. Towns that look to Heart & Soul are seeing positive change in many ways including:

* increased participation at community meetings, and more people in conversations including residents whose voices have not been heard in the past;
* traction in the local economy as new investment and new business begins to take hold guided by what matters most to residents;
* planners getting input and engagement that truly reflects a broad cross section of the community that goes beyond “stakeholders”;
* better decision-making, because officials meet people where they are and trust is built;
* residents finding common ground and focusing on what unites them not divides them;
* a renewed sense of community as residents see a way forward that incorporates what matters to them;
* a head start in competing for grant money because a town knows its story and can demonstrate wide buy-in from the community based on robust community engagement.

**What makes Community Heart & Soul different from other community development efforts?**

Community Heart & Soul goes beyond engagement to start conversations, and build relationships, connections, networks and ultimately stronger communities through action. Some of the things that make the model unique include:

* all segments of the community are engaged, including the hard to reach and underrepresented, in conversations about what matters most;
* use of storytelling to help people see each other not as statistics or data, but helps them understand the concerns, hopes, and dreams of others and helps them be better advocates for one another;
* generation of data from community engagement activities, including story sharing;
* creation of Heart & Soul Statements—drafted and agreed to by participants—that are adopted by elected officials and used for local planning and decision-making;
* identification of high-leverage action items that advance what matters most to all residents.

**How does the Community Heart & Soul model work?**

Community Heart & Soul is a model with four phases. Each phase is built around specific learning, capacity building, or engagement goals that lead to the overall project goals. A team of volunteers lead the project, which is typically coordinated by a paid Project Coordinator and guided by an Orton Coach. Here are the phases:

1. Lay the Groundwork: build a foundation by identifying partners and leaders, spreading the word, and developing a road map for successful engagement using Orton’s Community Network Analysis tool.

2. Explore Your Community: gather personal stories to identify shared community beliefs and understand how those beliefs are affected by community trends and conditions.

3. Make Decisions: identify options for the future and base decisions on what best enhances and preserves a community’s heart and soul.

4. Take Action: partners commit to action and residents take ownership. Heart & Soul principles are applied to future community efforts.

**What results have towns seen?**

Community Heart & Soul towns have witnessed transformation. Heart & Soul gets communities to see possibilities instead of obstacles. That transformation leads to more positive attitudes, which leads to positive change. Here are examples:

**Biddeford, Maine** (pop. 21,000) created a plan for downtown revitalization. In the seven years since then, $90 million in new projects had been approved including redevelopment of 1.6 million square feet of abandoned textile mills. Ninety new businesses came to town. [Watch video at Orton.org/success-stories](https://www.orton.org/success-stories/)

**Gardiner, Maine** (pop. 5,700) landed $5 million in Community Development Block Grants and other grants for economic development including two meat processing facilities and a downtown food cooperative to support regional agriculture, a craft cider operation, and a distillery. Supporting a strong local economy was a theme that emerged during the town’s Heart & Soul project.

**Cortez, Colorado** (pop. 8,500) found a new way to do business through taking a deep look into the community and investing time building trust. Groups that had not been involved in local government including the Ute Mountain Ute tribe, the Hispanic community, and youth were all much more engaged after Community Heart & Soul. Seats on several town advisory boards were created for youth representatives.

**Golden, Colorado** (pop. 19,000) Actively engaging residents, gathering their stories, and analyzing them resulted in three guiding themes: Accessible and Walkable; Active Outdoors/Environment; Safe, Clean, Quiet Neighborhoods. These became their guide for vibrant comprehensive plan updates, neighborhood plans, land use decisions, code changes and community investment decisions. Golden was recognized with awards from the International Association of Public Participation and the Denver Regional Council of Governments.

**How long does a Community Heart & Soul project take?**

In developing and field testing the model over a decade, a two-year timeline was used the majority of the time.

**What financial resources are needed?**

The investment to fully implement Community Heart & Soul is approximately $40,000 to $50,000 each year over a two-year period, the bulk of which is used to retain a local person as a full-time project coordinator. Other resource needs could include hiring a technical assistance as needed, meeting space, food and other costs for creating creative engagement and activities.

**Does Orton help fund Community Heart & Soul?**

Orton does not award grants. Many communities see the value and invest town budgets. Others work with partners including community foundations, aligned nonprofits, other foundations, and local and state government agencies to fund, bring technical assistance and even donate resources for Heart & Soul projects. Helpful free resources and tools along with the Community Heart & Soul Field Guide, are all available online.

**What is the Orton Family Foundation?**

Based in Shelburne, Vermont with offices in Arvada, Colorado, the Orton Family Foundation is focused on building stronger, healthier, and more economically vibrant small cities and towns across America. Founded in Vermont in 1995, the foundation devoted more than a decade to working with small towns to create a community development model that helps build trust and empowers residents to shape the future of their communities. Community Heart & Soul® projects are underway across the country creating positive change that is resident-driven and recognizes the value in the unique character of each place and the deep emotional connection of the people who live there.

For more information visit [www.orton.org](http://www.orton.org)

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