AN EXAMINATION OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING PROCESSES TO
ASSESS THE POTENTIAL FOR INCREASING INNOVATION IN PRACTICE

A Dissertation in
Rural Sociology

by
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ABSTRACT

The emphasis of this research is to examine opportunities for rural residents to maximize the potential for innovation within community organizing processes associated with community development initiatives. This dissertation brings together community, community field, and innovation literatures to frame community development work as a form of innovation. The first objective of this project is to document rural community organizing processes for community development in four communities, and compare them to an innovation process conceptual framework. The second objective is to examine the role of social networks in these community organizing processes, in order to suggest potential modifications to these networks to more effectively catalyze innovative ideas to address community-identified issues.

These two objectives were accomplished through research utilizing a multiple case study methodology. Data were collected through archival research and key informant interviews in four rural communities, Blissfield and Portland in Michigan, and Clearfield and Titusville in Pennsylvania. These communities were identified through their participation in the Main Street Program, which requires communities to engage in a community organizing process prior to acceptance into the program. The community organizing processes and the social networks utilized within them were analyzed according to the innovation process conceptual framework and findings presented. Finally, concluding remarks on the research findings, future opportunities for research, and policy implications were presented.
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Chapter 1

Introduction
I entered the graduate program in Rural Sociology because I hoped to make a difference in communities. In my professional work in higher education and community development, I have been privileged to work domestically and internationally in numerous small, rural villages. In many of these communities I have noticed the same types of challenges that confront my own family and neighbors. The people in my rural hometown face physical isolation, economic hardship, lack of access to resources, and increasing travel distances in order to obtain work. The need to address rural inequalities like these was my motivation for the research conducted for this dissertation.

Community development practice could benefit from an extensive body of scholarship dedicated to exploring the process of innovation and its outcomes. My rural community development work exposed a glaring need for more innovative strategies for community organizing, especially developing processes that enable community members to effectively address community issues. Organizing processes that are informed by the innovation literature could result in rural residents benefiting from novel ways of exploring new options rather than repeating previous efforts and ideas. Of interest for this research are the ways communities organize, to explore how their community development processes may better align with tenets from the innovation literature to enhance the opportunity for more innovative approaches to addressing community issues. When organizing for community development, plurality is emphasized to ensure diversity of perspective, representation across social fields in decision making, maximization of assets (human and otherwise); but rarely is the connection made to innovation, that connection across areas of difference (across social networks) is a way to organize for innovation within community development. In this way, organizing becomes both an
innovation (because it is a new way of connecting across social fields, organizing within the community field) as well as a way to organize for innovative ideas to address community identified issues.

When we think about innovation, what may come to mind is a specific product, such as an iPhone, a new tractor, or the internet. However, an innovation may also take the form of a new process or program for accomplishing a task, such as tackling an issue that community members identify as needing attention. I consider this community-level innovation: the creation and implementation of a novel approach to addressing an issue that affects multiple stakeholder groups across an entire community.

Innovation and community organizing intersect in another significant way: they both rely on the facilitation and promotion of social connections among people (their social networks) across areas of difference. Both innovation and community development processes benefit from using existing social connections as well as creating new connections between people to increase access to resources like knowledge and financial resources (Burt, 2004; Johannson, 2006). Many approaches to community development already emphasize pluralism, bringing together groups of residents from across a community to address shared challenges (Block, 2008; Christenson & Robinson, 1980; Gilchrist & Taylor, 2013; Wilkinson, 1999). Community development may be considered a form of innovation, facilitating the intentional connection of individuals across a community to develop solutions to community-identified issues. Therefore, mapping out these organizing processes, and understanding how or if they align with the business literature on innovation may help to understand if this is the case.
Innovation follows a general trajectory of three stages: identification of need, idea formation, and implementation, but within these stages, there are critical ways that people connect across and within social networks. By examining community organizing processes in community development initiatives through this framework of innovation, it is possible to explore structures of human interaction that have the possibility to catalyze greater community-level innovation, or innovative responses to community identified issues. In Chapter 2 I describe more fully the conceptual framework for innovation in a community context.

This research has two main objectives. The first objective is to document rural community organizing processes for community development in four communities, and compare them to an innovation process conceptual framework. Understanding the nuances of community organizing will provide key insights to help assist rural communities seeking opportunities to address the issues they face in innovative ways. Ultimately, research on community-level innovation and community organizing may help to assist rural residents to identify and effectively implement solutions to the issues facing their communities. The second objective is to examine the role of social networks in these community organizing processes, in order to suggest potential modifications to these networks to more effectively catalyze innovative ideas to address community-identified issues. Of interest for this research is the process used by communities to approach issues. Modification to this process may assist in producing additional innovative outcomes. Additionally, the process has the potential to be the community-level innovation itself, as it may be a new way of connecting across the community to address residents’ needs. This research does not provide a judgment of the
innovativeness of the outcomes of the process that communities use to address issues. Instead, the organizing process is analyzed according to my conceptual framework, exploring how successful it was as a form of community-level innovation.

This research focuses specifically on rural areas. Similarly to the anecdotal evidence in my hometown, many American rural areas face shrinking economies, limited access to resources, and low population densities. Rural economies are typically small and lack diversity across industry sectors (Brown & Schafft, 2011), leaving rural areas at risk of economic hardship. The primary employment sectors of rural Americans were once agriculture, extraction industries (i.e. coal, timber, mining), and manufacturing; these have steadily declined due to the changing structure of agriculture and global economic restructuring (Brown & Kandel, 2006; Vias & Nelson, 2006). Additionally, rural workers are more likely than urban workers to be employed in low-skilled, low-paying jobs in the service sector or manual labor (Gibbs, Kusmin, & Cromartie, 2005), or contingent or varied-hour work, all of which provide less stability and generally lack benefits (McLaughlin & Coleman-Jensen, 2008).

A lack of access to resources places some rural places at a disadvantage to attract new industries and businesses. Land-based infrastructure (roads, rail, etc.) is in disproportionate disrepair in rural America (Alter et al., 2010). Access to information and communication technologies is also regionally disparate; the lack of high speed, broadband internet access in remote areas has created what is referred to as “the digital divide” (Copps, 2009; Fortunato et al., 2010; GAO, 2006; Grubesic, 2006; Grubesic, 2008). Rural places traditionally have low access to capital for investing in business development (Dabson, 2001). Some rural places also face the well-documented issue of
brain drain, whereby younger, more educated individuals leave for urban areas, seeking better employment opportunities (Brown & Schafft, 2011). Additionally, interaction with broader contexts and areas of knowledge is more limited in rural areas (Wilkinson, 1999), which may hamper the ability of these places to identify new ways of doing things and access the resources needed to tackle issues rural residents identify in their communities.

The results of research on community-level innovation may help to assist rural residents searching for ways to organize to address the issues they face. Understanding the nuances of community organizing will help elucidate key insights to help assist rural communities seeking opportunities to address the issues they face in innovative ways.

To do this I examine community organizing processes with the specific goal of addressing issues that affect individuals across the entire community. The organizing processes used in this dissertation also emphasized participation in community organizing efforts that involve individuals across the community. In order to understand community organizing processes, I study four communities that have become involved with the Main Street Program. The four communities are Blissfield and Portland in Michigan and Clearfield and Titusville in Pennsylvania. The Main Street program is a community development initiative with community-wide participation as an explicit requirement for application and participation. The Main Street Program promotes revitalization of communities while encouraging preservation of local assets (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2012). States establish a charter with the National Main Street Center through the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Upon successful creation of a charter, states are able to certify communities that meet the requirements for the Main Street Program. Each community must apply to be part of the Main Street Program.
Specific criteria for admission into the program vary in each state, but in all cases a state must ensure that a community meets and maintains the National Main Street Center’s (2014a) Ten Standards of Performance for Accreditation:

1. Has broad-based community support for the commercial district revitalization process, with strong support from both the public and private sectors.
2. Has developed a vision and mission statements relevant to community conditions and to Local Program’s organizational stage
3. Has a comprehensive Main Street work plan with measurable objectives
4. Possesses an historic preservation ethic
5. Has an active board of directors and committees
6. Has an adequate operating budget
7. Has a paid professional program director
8. Conducts a program of on-going training for staff and volunteers
9. Reports key statistics
10. Is a current member of the National Main Street Network.

The emphasis of the Main Street Program does not preference one issue over another in a community, but ensures residents address multiple types of issues. The program utilizes the “four point approach” (National Main Street Center, 2014b). Communities must form committees that address four strategic areas: organization, or creating connections across the community to build support for community organizing initiatives; promotion, or developing a positive image to publicize and promote the community; design, or examining ways to improve the physical environment of a
community; and finally, economic restructuring, or redeveloping and diversifying the community’s economic base (National Main Street Center, 2014b). Each community must designate a Main Street district, a downtown area that is the focal point for development initiatives. These districts are heavily focused on the business owners and downtown economic activity in the community. While the Main Street district may serve as the hub for activity of the initiatives, the goal of the program is to assist and aid in revitalization that would benefit the entire committee.

My research was not designed to assess the effectiveness or innovativeness of the Main Street approach itself. Instead, I was interested in the Main Street Program’s emphasis on an inclusive process and outcome that includes the entire community, which requires that a community work through an organizing process. Being accepted for participation in the Main Street program is an indicator of a community that has worked through an organizing process to address community needs. This criterion was used to identify potential study sites for this research. Using a list of communities that were part of the Main Street Program, I identified communities that would be able to recount the narrative of their process as well as describe the social networks of individuals involved in the community organizing process. To discern this, I utilized publicly available websites and data that allowed me to discern which communities kept records of their processes. Additionally, the Main Street Program requires significant documentation in each site with regards to their organizing process, which I was able to access. In addition to these data, I also selected communities that were in two separate states (Michigan and Pennsylvania); in nonmetropolitan, micropolitan counties; of similar population; of similar median household income; there was a maximized distance between the sites (to
decrease the likelihood of social network overlap); the time frame when they applied to
the Main Street Program; and the organizing process was community-led (rather than
instituted through local government).

In order to achieve my two research objectives I addressed two research
questions. What community organizing processes did the case study rural communities
use before becoming part of the Main Street Program? And, how are social networks
utilized for community organizing processes in the case study rural communities as they
decide to join the Main Street Program?

I used a comparative case study methodology, constructing the narratives from
key informant interviews and archival data. The cases were bounded by both geography
and time. Each case is a rural community that participated in the Main Street Program,
and each case documents the community organizing process up until the community
made application to the Main Street Program. Two of the sites are located in Michigan
and two in Pennsylvania. The methodology used for the case selection and case study
narrative creation and analysis is explained in greater detail in Chapter 3.

The two sites in Michigan utilized in this study were Portland and Blissfield. The
community organizing processes in these two communities are explained in the case
studies found in Chapter 5. The Pennsylvania communities studied were Clearfield and
Titusville. The communities and context for these Pennsylvania communities and are
described in Chapter 6.

In Chapter 7, I analyze each case using the innovation process conceptual
framework developed in this research. As a result of this analysis, I suggest ways that the
community’s organizing process could have been adjusted to increase their potential for
developing additional innovative ideas for addressing the community-identified needs.

Within the context of each state, I compare the cases to identify key themes within each state. I then compare the state themes that arise from the case studies across states, identifying ways that state-level governance can affect local community organizing processes and innovative outcomes of local initiatives.

Finally, I conduct a cross-case comparison across all sites, identifying the following important considerations. The first is that while places may have similarities in the framework of their community organizing processes, the details of the execution differ from place to place. Second, community organizing processes were not linear, but rather they looped back to previous efforts or spawned new processes. Third, the impetus to begin the community organizing process was a combination of external influences and internal assets and motivations of the individual(s) who initiated the process. Fourth, the strength of ties was activated in different ways throughout the processes. Fifth, protecting the organizing group from others in the community who may be resistant to change proved to be important in different phases of the organizing process and for different communities. Sixth, access to both local and external knowledge was key in order to access resources throughout the organizing processes. Seventh, communities may need to slow their processes down at times to allow for community feedback and greater and broader involvement by community members. Finally, not all communities incorporated participation from across the community, and instead relied on specific sectors or social network ties to drive the process forward.
The final chapter provides a summary and reflections on the research process. Based on the findings I also identify several opportunities for future research and policy suggestions for communities engaging in these processes.
Chapter 2

Situating Innovation in a Community Context:

Literature Review and Community Innovation Conceptual Framework
This chapter is an exploration of the intersection of community and innovation theory, drawing upon community field theory to understand how members of communities come together to innovate. The aim of this research is to explore whether or how community development processes are similar to innovation processes as described in the business innovation literature. There are synergies that exist with regards to the connection of individuals across areas of difference within both the community field theory and innovation literatures. To understand the interactions between individuals within these processes, I use social network theory to better understand the types of social connections and networks that seem to exist when an innovation occurs in a community. This builds upon existing theory (Giuffree, 2013; Sharp, 2001) by helping to identify these connections within the community field, if the community field exists in a community, during community organizing processes.

I begin by defining the concept of community. Next, I examine the concept of community organizing in community development at the community-level, drawing upon ideas from community field theory. I explain the use of social network theory to map out community organizing processes. The concept of innovation is explored as the basis for understanding, the process of innovation according to social network theory. I situate an innovation conceptual framework in a community context to analyze community organizing examples. The chapter ends with a summary of several approaches utilized by the private sector and communities to catalyze innovation, identifying principles important in organizing efforts that seek to create a context for innovation.
Community and Community Development

This section explores the concepts of community and community development. The community development literature is very broad; the aspect within this literature of interest to this research is within the community field literature. I begin by examining and defining the concept of community used in this research. I then explore what is meant by community development, framed specifically within the community field theory literature. I finish by discussing how social network theory may be used to identify an empirical picture of the social connections within a community and the community field, if it exists.

Defining Community

In order to properly contextualize the alignment of community and innovation literatures, I must first clarify the term “community.” This term has many possible definitions (Phillips & Pittman, 2009). Christenson and Robinson (1980), for instance, indicate four components of community, including people, territory or area, social interaction, and identification with a community. Wilkinson (1999) poses three elements of community, “namely, a locality, a local society, and a process of locality oriented collective actions” (p. 2). Warren (1978) defines the concept of community “as that combination of social units and systems that perform the major social functions having locality relevance” (p. 138). Community can also refer to a sense of belonging based on a shared interest, not necessarily a specific place (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004; Hustedde, 2009; Phillips & Pittman, 2009).
These definitions all share three distinct components: “location, social system, and common identity” (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004, p. 8). Whether in a physical place or as a common interest, community is formed by people and their interactions.

Social interaction is required for community, but the specific characteristics of these interactions help to define more closely what it means to be part of a community. Social interactions and connections in a locality enable the possibility for relationships between individuals. The formation of community requires that through these social connections, people take action to organize to meet their individual and collective needs (Block, 2008; Wilkinson, 1999). This decision to act together is a defining factor of community, because it indicates a sense of ownership by people within a locality to fulfill the needs of all individuals across that locality (Block, 2008).

Community is the focus of this research, specifically with regard to collective action within a locality to meet the needs of individuals across that locality. Collective action in a specific place at times may not always be able to meet the needs of local individuals, or it may preference the interests of one group of people over others, or could no longer occur. When this happens, individuals in that place may need additional strategies and capacities to draw from to assist their community. This need for new strategies for collective action is what motivates this research, and is directly linked to the concept and practice of community development.

**Defining Community Development and Community Organizing**

“Community development” refers to both “a process [emphasis in original]: developing and enhancing the ability to act collectively, and an outcome [emphasis in
original]: (1) taking collective action and (2) the result of that action for improvement in a community in any or all realms: physical, environmental, cultural, social, political, economic, etc.” (Phillips and Pittman, 2009, p. 6). Collective action in a community can also be referred to as community organizing. “Community organizing” may at times have social justice connotations (Giuffre, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2008), however it can refer more generally to the mobilization and participation of individuals involved in community development efforts. The latter is the connotation intended in this research.

Wilkinson (1999) defines community development as “purposive efforts to build the generalized structure that characterizes a community field” (p. 85). This definition is based upon community field theory (Wilkinson, 1999), the core tenet of which is that social interactions take place in a specific locale. When individuals interact based upon a specific interest or for a specific purpose, they are creating a social field. This social field is dynamic and constantly changing according to the interactions that comprise it. Its membership includes “actors, associations (both organized and unorganized), and activities directed towards certain interests” (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 33). While a community may be comprised of many social fields, there is a specific field, or group of individuals, bound together by interest in many of the issues of the local community: the community field. Because of this shared interest in the locality, the community field unifies people across distinct social fields. It does not include all social interaction in that place, only those actions directed at enhancing the well-being of all individuals within the locality (Wilkinson, 1999). Community development in this context refers to the purposive effort to develop the community field, specifically the interactions between individuals that are engaged in community organizing efforts aimed at positively
affecting community well-being. This is not spontaneous but requires thoughtful facilitation within and between community organizing efforts. I contend that the community field encompasses all community organizing efforts that aim to positively affect well-being across the entire community, even though these efforts may not be directly linked, as well as the ways in which they are carried out. The community field is about both the ways people come together to impact the community, as well as the outcomes of that organizing.

Community organizing efforts that are located within the community field are considered “community-level”, as they are aimed at improving and enhancing the needs of individuals across the entire community. Community organizing efforts are strongest when they encompass the perspectives of all social fields within a community, as it ensures that all perspectives and needs are equally considered (Wilkinson, 1999). It is through this connection across difference within the community field, through community organizing efforts, that community development occurs (Wilkinson, 1999). It is the structure of the community organizing efforts amongst individuals within the community field that is of interest in this research.

**Social Networks, Organizing and Community Development**

Social fields, and specifically the community field, can at times seem nebulous and ethereal, as membership changes according to those interacting associated with a defined interest. It is a highly theoretical concept, difficult to explain without listing the individuals associated with a social field and their interactions over time. Sharp (2001) utilized social network theory to map out in a more specific manner social fields and the
community field. This proved to be an effective manner to capture the extent to which and how individuals in the social field interact, and doing so provides a way to capture the social connections within community organizing efforts.

**Understanding Social Networks.** A social network is the collection of relationships between people (Wasserman & Faust, 2009). Social network analysis examines the structure of this social interaction (Giuffre, 2013). A social network may be the connections belonging to one entity or individual, also known as an *ego network*, or it may be the collection of connections in a given population or place (Wasserman & Faust, 2009). The emphasis in this research is on the latter of the two networks, which I will simply refer to as a social network for the purposes of this study. This theoretical perspective can be applied to individuals, organizations, and events, depending on the scale of the connections one hopes to explore.

Within social networks, individuals or entities (actors) to be mapped and analyzed are called nodes. Connections between nodes are called ties. Ties between nodes can be weighted, indicating greater or lesser strength (Wasserman and Faust, 2009). Within a social network, understanding the strength of ties can help to provide a greater depth to the connections between individuals. In terms of identifying the community field, using this method, it is possible to map out the interactions of individuals within the community field, those involved in community organizing efforts that aim to positively affect the community, as well as the strength of the ties between those individuals (Sharp, 2001). Including the strength of the ties can provide greater nuance to understanding to the types of connections within the community field.
Grannovetter (1973) describes both strong and weak ties. In general, the strength of a tie can be characterized by the amount of time, intensity, intimacy, and reciprocity between the two nodes. Strong ties refer to those connections between individuals in a social system that are reinforced regularly, and have more weight in the social interactions of individuals regarding their personal decisions. Weak ties are more informal connections between individuals, and may span a greater geographic area. These ties between individuals are not as regularly reinforced, although connections are kept open. Granovetter argues that weak ties provide a greater ability to create change within a social system, because they introduce new information and connect the individual with a larger variety of perspectives and possibly new and different resources. Strong ties between people typically are fewer and typically exist between likeminded people, more often based in family and long-term relationships, and may limit diversity of perspective.

**Mapping Community Organizing Social Networks.** To understand the interactions within a community, mapping these social connections will be key. To do so, I describe below how to do this in an empirical manner. The overall structure of interactions among individuals within a community may be considered a network. Note that not every individual within a community’s network will be connected to each other. Within a network, there may be subgroups. Each subgroup is a specific group of actors with one or more shared interests. Within a community network, subgroups in a network may have actors that overlap (Wasserman & Faust, 2009), but it is unlikely that subgroup in a community is linked to every other subgroup. Within this network, individuals may affiliate with a particular social field such as a running club. It is possible to then create an “affiliation subgroup” of a network based upon those shared interests (Wasserman &
Faust, 2009), analyze the ties among nodes within this subgroup, and how they change over time. This subgroup can simply be treated as its own network, noting that it exists within a larger population.

Relating this to a community, Wilkinson (1999) indicates that a community encompasses multiple social fields with overlapping members. Within that community, a portion of the population is interested in and acting on improving the well-being of everyone in the community, and they would be considered part of a specific social field also called the community field (Wilkinson, 1999), as previously mentioned. Building from this definition, the interactions of individuals involved with a community field would then be considered to be a sub-group of the entire community’s population, and the connections between individuals within the community field can simply be referred to as the community field network.

Wilkinson’s (1999) definition of the community field requires broad representation from across social fields within the community. Therefore, when conceptually mapping out the community field of a community utilizing network theory and methods, it would be expected that a representation of all social fields be present. This does not mean that everyone in the community is also a member of the community field. Everyone that is considered part of a community will not be involved in organizing efforts to address issues in that community that affect the entire community. Different individuals that represent the social fields in a community may participate in a community field, and these individuals may change across time. To effectively map the network of the community field, the network diagram of the interactions of individuals within a community network will need to reflect change over time. To do so requires that
multiple measurements of the connections during several time points be taken, to be able to display the change in participation of individuals and connections between them within the community field over time. Although the individuals that may be part of the community field may change over time, ideally all social fields should be represented in the community field throughout time.

Ideally, one community field would exist. When mapping out the network of individuals in an organizing processes working on an issue to positively affect the entire community, it may be that there are unconnected groups of people that are engaged in community organizing efforts. While one group may be working on an issue that affects the well being of the entire community, it may be completely unconnected from another group that is working to address another community issue. This may mean that instead of one community field, several community fields could exist. This would be reflected as separate community field networks. Efforts to strengthen the community field could be to increase interactions and connections of these separate community fields across one community field.

These concepts are illustrated in Figure 1. The community network box represents all of the connections among individuals in a simplified community; in an actual community there would be more nodes (individuals) and connections. The community field (see the community field box) encompasses those individuals that are collaborating to create positive change on issues that affect the entire community. The nodes in the illustration represent people, and in the community field they are colored to represent their affiliation with specific social fields. In this example, there are four social fields in
the community field. Figure 1 (community field) shows a simplified representation of the network that might comprise a community field.

In the ideal theoretical setting, the community field includes individuals who are involved in at least one social field and every social field in the community is represented in the community network. In the ideal case, even though the actual nodes (individuals involved) may change, the representation of the social fields will continue. The nodes represent individuals that would be considered part of a distinct social field. However, in reality not all social fields may be represented in the community field. Additionally, individuals may simultaneously represent more than one social field. Note that there may be several community organizing efforts that will exist in the community at the same time. How these multiple efforts are organized or coordinated in the community field is less clear, but these individuals and efforts may be bound by their common interest in positively affecting community well-being, even though the efforts may not necessarily
be connected. Meaning, they may not have any individuals overlap in the two distinct community fields.

It is possible to identify these specific community organizing efforts within the community field, and learn more about them, their purpose, which other social fields are involved, and their effectiveness. It is important to examine this because these data and their subsequent analyses help to understand what is needed in community development efforts to assist in strengthening the community field. Community development efforts may require intentional facilitation to increase the representation in community organizing processes that are meant to affect the well being of the entire community. Or, facilitation may be needed to connect distinct community fields. However, this may not be known unless mapping out of the interactions within community organizing efforts occur. Additionally, lack of representation from across the community within these efforts may hinder innovation in a community organizing process, which the next section discusses.

**Innovation and Community Organizing and Development**

When tackling issues that affect individuals across the entire community, developing new, innovative ideas and solutions within a community can help to meet the needs of the community. In community field theory, an emphasis is on understanding how bringing together individuals across social fields within the community can lead to more positive outcomes that benefit the community broadly defined (Wilkinson, 1999). Because people often tend to interact with others like themselves with similar interests, creating a community field that brings individuals with different interests, knowledge and
resources together may spur innovation. This innovation may occur in the way people connect with each other to create new ideas and solutions, or it may result in new patterns of interaction so that the community field can more effectively meet community needs.

This mirrors the literature on innovation that calls for the uniting of individuals in an inclusive process across areas of expertise to increase the opportunity for developing innovative ideas (Burt, 2004; Coakes & Smith, 2007; Johansson, 2006; Stefik & Stefik, 2004). Similarly to community development and the mapping of social field and the community field, it is also possible to map how people interact in the process of innovation. The following section defines innovation and outlines the process of innovation, delineating the use of social networks throughout, finishing by situating innovation within a community context.

**Defining Innovation**

The substantial literature on innovation defines the concept in multiple ways, much like community and community development have been conceptualized in multiple ways. The National Economic Council (2009), for instance, defines innovation as “the development of new products, services, and processes” (p. 4). “[T]he UK Government defines innovation as the successful exploitation of new ideas” (Mahroum, 2007, p. 6). Innovation has also been defined as “both radical and incremental changes in thinking, in technology, or in services” (Douthwaite, Beaulieu, Lundy, & Peters, 2009, p. 43). Shavinina & Seeratan state “[i]nnovation is the generation, acceptance, and implementation of new ideas, processes, products, or services” (2003, p. 31). Innovations may be new or revised products, new processes or methods of production, development
of a new market, new ways to organize business, or a new supply of raw materials (Schumpeter, 1917, as cited in Dabholkar, 2010). Gaynor (2002, pp. 16-17) emphasizes that “innovation begins with an idea that is transformed into a concept that includes some new combination of what is already known and can be implemented to serve some purpose.”

Drawing from these definitions to apply and frame innovation within a community context, community-level innovation can be described as a novel approach to addressing an issue that is implemented through efforts within the community field. Framing it in this way indicates that the goal of innovation in the community setting is to explore new ways to meet the needs of individuals across the community. This may mean that an innovation could be a novel way of structuring interactions for organizing within the community field, which may be the process of organizing itself. Additionally, this separates innovation from creative ideas. Creative ideas are mere theory, and remain that way until they come into reality (Gaynor, 2002). The key in this framing of innovation is predicated on taking an idea beyond creation into utility (Gaynor, 2002; Kaufmann, 2003) through community organizing efforts.

Innovation can be categorized by multiple typologies, important when considering its effects on people, systems, companies, or communities. First, an innovation can be considered radical or incremental. A radical innovation is one that represents a large deviation or shift from previous iterations or else is entirely new. An incremental innovation is one that makes marked but smaller improvements on a previous process or technique (Douthwaite, Beaulieu, Lundy, & Peters, 2009; Gaynor, 2002; Stefik & Stefik, 2004).
Christensen (1997) provides a second typology in his discussion of sustaining or disruptive technologies. Sustaining technologies focus on innovations within an existing market or products catering to existing customers. Disruptive technologies are those innovations that create alternatives to the dominant market or product (Christensen, 1997; Christensen, Baumann, Ruggles, & Sadtler, 2006; Gaynor, 2002).

Gaynor (2002) provides a third typology with three elements. First he discusses discontinuous innovation, which refers to those outcomes that make previous versions obsolete. This is synonymous with Schumpeter’s theory of creative destruction in innovation (Schumpeter, 1917, as cited in Dabholkar, 2010). Architectural innovation occurs when components of a product, process, or service are redesigned or reconfigured. Finally, systems innovation is very large in scope and scale, involves the collusion of several different entities and disciplines, and typically requires years for completion. The internet is a prime example.

Innovation can come in other forms as well. If power structures and established norms are the targeted items for change and innovation, then institutional innovation is necessary. Institutions are structures of behavior—sets of norms, rules, guides, and relationships that define how individuals are to act within a given context or social system (Sanders, 1958; Warren, 1978; Ruttan & Hayami, 1984; Schmid, 2004; Van De Ven & Hargrave, 2004; Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2006). A social system encompasses a collection of actors with a common purpose and the institutions that guide their interaction (Meadows, 2008). These institutions may be formal—explicit and discussed—or informal—emergent, purposive actions taken by individuals (Schmid, 2004). Laws, for example, are formal institutions, while cultural norms are informal.
Innovation at the community-level may rely on the same mechanisms as these previously discussed types of innovation. Additionally, these typologies of innovation may overlap when exploring how innovation occurs at the community level; there may be simultaneous innovation processes occurring in separate community fields, or these different innovation processes could be connected in a community field because of the diversity of individuals and interests represented.

A brief note about semantics for this research: I have defined innovation as an outcome, the product of a process. This product may be a process of organizing for use in a community. This is to mean that the outcome may be a new way for people to organize in a community to come together to work on an issue. The term innovator refers to an individual who is engaging in this process. Finally, the word innovative is a qualifier indicating that an idea or invention has the potential to be an innovation or has already been determined to be an innovation.

The Process of Innovation

Based on a review and analysis of innovation literature, I present a process model of innovation in three stages: first, the identification of a problem or need for change; second, idea formation; third, implementation. I discuss each stage, mapping out potential actors in a network diagram format. This section utilizes the terms strong and weak ties to discuss connections between people. To refresh these terms from earlier in this chapter, weak ties refer to those informal, less regularly reinforced relationships that are found more commonly among acquaintances (Grannovetter, 1973). Strong ties on the other hand are close relationships that are found between close friends or family members.
(Grannovetter, 1973). Although I present these innovation stages linearly, innovation development in reality is emergent and non-linear, enhanced by the interaction of multiple parties in the context in which they exist (Tura & Harmaakorpi, 2005).

While there is an overall trajectory in hindsight, innovation development can be messy and complex while the process occurs. This may require adjustment at any stage, may require a movement back to a previous stage, and may spawn new and even unexpected innovations at any point in the process. The overall model is presented in its entirety at the end of this section as a conceptual framework that aligns with the community field literature, specifically describing the connections across the community that may need to occur in each stage. While this model represents the process of innovation, it also serves as a model to organize for innovation in a community. Both the organizing process and the outcomes from it would be considered innovations when describing innovation in the community.

**Innovation Stage 1: Identification of Need**

The innovation development process begins by identifying a problem, opportunity, or need for change (Berkun, 2007; Gaynor, 2002). There is an element of readiness associated with this part of the process; an individual or organization needs to be willing to address an issue. It may come from the interaction of several individuals that collectively recognize the need. Additionally, it may be based on a previous idea or the result of an earlier innovation process. The identification of need may result from an emerging or unforeseen opportunity or threat, or it may develop from an area of growth previously unrealized. The ability to see the need does not come spontaneously; it is built
on insights and knowledge gained from previous experiences, and may take years to finally be recognized (Cooper, as cited in Gaynor 2002; Berkun, 2007; Van de Ven, as cited in Gaynor, 2002). Not all individuals, groups, and organizations will see opportunities for creativity and innovation, even when facing the same data, information, and situations, because of their particular intuitions, selective perceptions, and behaviors (Sarasvathy, 2008). For simplification purposes, the model follows an individual who would continue through the innovation process.

The impetus for trying to meet a need or solve a problem typically comes through either an external or internal shock that requires an individual to address the need (Van de Ven, as cited in Gaynor, 2002). The motivation to react to this initial shock is usually a combination of external, internal, and social factors. External factors originate outside a person, and can often be rewards or punishments, such as changes in funding. Intrinsic factors originate within individuals; for instance, personal values or excitement for an area of knowledge can lead a person to act. Finally, social factors represent the perception that engaging in certain actions will benefit the individual in their social relations (Cohen & Sauermann, 2007). The specific factors that lead to action will be dependent upon the individual’s particular context (Berkun, 2007).

After an individual makes the decision to act, there is usually a gestation period where the individual will reflect on the need and engage more fully with additional information to gain a deeper understanding of the need (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). An individual may engage others to talk more about this need, gaining feedback and gathering others interested in working in tandem with the individual. This is typically a small group, made up of people who are strongly tied to the individual (Lester & Piore,
2004), such as close friends, colleagues, or even family. If the feedback received from this initial group is positive, the individual will typically move forward into the next stage. If not, the process has the possibility of ending at this juncture (Lester & Piore, 2004). A negative experience does not always end the process here, however, depending on the level of dedication to the need. Individuals may seek additional feedback from others, pushing until someone else also sees the opportunity or potential (O’Connor, 2003). This stage is presented in Figure 2. The arrows on the ties indicate that the individual sought out the connection to others within this process.

Stage 2: Idea Formation

Once the individual decides to move forward with addressing the need, developing a response follows. This is typically the stage when innovative ideas are created. Stages one and two will likely overlap, as ideas are often generated during the
initial recognition of need (Gaynor, 2002). It is during this stage that actors develop innovations: new processes, practices, products, technologies, or policies. Idea formation in response to a need is an iterative and dynamic process, building upon previous knowledge and enhanced by new information (Berkun, 2007).

The development of innovative ideas requires facilitation (Price, 2005). Certain characteristics of idea facilitation create a culture with a greater potential for developing innovative ideas. First, the composition of the group itself requires attention. Individuals and their assets and characteristics directly influence the process of idea creation. The knowledge they possess is key, and those individuals involved in the idea creation process should represent multiple areas of knowledge and sources of information (Dyer, Gregersen, & Christensen, 2011; Kanter, 1988) across disciplines and specialties (Coakes & Smith, 2007; Johansson, 2006; Stefik & Stefik, 2004), or in the language of community sociology, they would come from different social fields (Wilkinson, 1999). This knowledge and information need not be related to formal disciplines or education, but could also be familiarity with a context and social system or based on personal experience. Actors who are connected to other relevant individuals are more productive in their idea creation (Cohen and Sauermann, 2007).

In addition to the individuals and their respective behaviors and characteristics, the interaction between individuals is also important in the process of innovation development. The interaction between different individuals and their assets increases the opportunity for innovative idea creation (Johansson, 2003). Innovation is not simply an individual process, but is enabled by a community structure (Van Oost, Verhaegh, & Oudshoorn, 2009). Community in this context refers to a more general definition than
previously mentioned to a collection of individuals interested in a similar endeavor acting to support each other, not necessarily bound by location. Innovation requires individuals to exchange and build upon one another’s ideas (Berkun, 2007; Coakes & Smith, 2007; Christensen & Raynor, 2003; Leonard-Barton & Sensiper, 1998; Stefik & Stefik, 2004).

The size of the group is also important, although the desired size will change over time. In the beginning, idea formation requires a small group of dedicated individuals (Farrell, 2001; Giuffre, 2013). These individuals may be the same people from whom an individual may have been gathering support in the identification of need stage (Lester & Piore). However, it may be an entirely new group of people who are deemed to have the appropriate knowledge, experience, or abilities to create ideas to respond to the identified need (Lester & Piore, 2004). These individuals will likely be personally familiar to the facilitating individual.

The relationships and open communication among the group require a culture of trust and openness, and even a willingness to entertain outlandish ideas (Berkun, 2007; Gaynor, 2002; Lester & Piore, 2004; O’Connor, 2003; Price, 2005). Berkun (2007) provides four principles associated with the culture of idea creation:

1. Produce as many ideas as possible
2. Produce ideas as wild as possible
3. Build upon each other’s ideas
4. Avoid passing judgment. (p. 92)

To create this culture of openness, the facilitator must find ways to protect the idea creation from external influences that may reinforce the status quo. Facilitation requires someone with credibility in the larger context that will eventually use the ideas generated.
Establishing a goal for the focus of the group is necessary, but adherence to this goal must be fluid enough to ensure that it does not limit the creation of ideas (Lester & Piore, 2004).

At some juncture, this group of individuals will need to involve others with additional areas of expertise and access to assets in order to either develop additional ideas or to move to the next stage, implementation. These additional actors could be connected to those involved in this smaller group, or new individuals who may be seen as experts (Lester and Piore, 2004). Burt (2004) found that individuals who connected between networks of individuals, across what he called “structural holes,” developed more creative ideas. Individuals who shared these ideas with people outside a close social circle had a higher likelihood of action based upon those ideas (Burt, 2004). However, once these individuals have had the opportunity to provide input into the process, it will take dedication of time and resources to move the idea stage into the implementation stage (O’Connor, 2003; Scotchmer, 2004). The idea formation stage is represented in Figure 3. The solid circle around the individuals represents the need for insulation from external pressures and influences. The arrow at the end of the weak ties indicates that the members of the group created that tie to external members.
**Stage 3: Implementation**

To truly be considered innovation according to my framing, the ideas generated in the previous stage must be implemented. If a response to a need is not spread, transferred, or adopted, an idea simply remains an idea. In the spread of the response developed in the process of innovation, there are three phases: creation, diffusion and adoption.

**Creation.** Creating a product from an innovative idea requires that ideas be prioritized and implemented (Lester & Piore, 2004). To do so will require significant dedication of time and resources (financial and otherwise) in order to move from theory to application (Scotchmer, 2004; O’Connor, 2003). At this time, feedback from users (those who will be adopting the innovation) is crucial, to ensure the innovation’s utility (Von Hippel, 2005). During this process, a permeability between the Idea Formation stage and the Implementation stage may be required, as new ideas may needed to more effectively meet users’ needs (Gaynor, 2002).

**Diffusion.** Once an innovation is created, it must then be dispersed. Diffusion refers to the spread of an innovation through information transfer via communication from one user to the next (Jones, 1963; Rogers, 2003; Wejnert, 2002), whether among individuals, groups, or multiple individuals through mass communication (Rogers, 2003; Wejnert, 2002). Diffusion is specifically concerned with geographical spread (Jones, 1963), although it may be relegated to a specific context or area due to those individuals involved in the spread. The relationship between those disbursing the knowledge of an innovation and those implementing it is an important factor in enabling innovation adoption. In terms of social networks, those individuals and organizations with weaker ties to others may foster the spread of innovations more readily than those with
predominantly strong ties, but the innovation is more likely to be adopted if they have stronger ties (Grannovetter, 1973).

The power structure of a network is key when considering the spread of innovations (Grannovetter, 1973; Wejnert 2002). In a network, there are always individuals with greater social influence than others. Those that have higher social status are less likely to spread innovations that place their social status at risk, while those with lower social status are more willing to take greater risk with innovative practices (Wejnert, 2002). Individuals, even if they are not the originator of the idea, may be able to affect systemic change by championing or backing an innovative solution to an issue (Coakes & Smith, 2007). Alternatively, those with more power in the social network have the ability to decrease the amount of information transmitted, as well as its credibility (Grannovetter, 1973), increasing the ability to block an idea from becoming action, if they wish to do so (Christensen & Raynor, 2003).

**Adoption.** The final phase in the implementation of innovation is adoption. This indicates that an individual is implementing the innovation learned about in the diffusion stage (Jones, 1963; Rogers, 2003; Wejnert, 2002). This is the goal of the innovation process: widespread adoption so that a system is changed. Those who adopt an innovative idea or product have a role in the further diffusion. Trust is needed for individuals to take the information in the diffusion stage to demonstrate that the practice and product is a beneficial change, and move to the adoption of innovative practices (Agarwal, 1983; Pannell et al., 2006, Pound, 2008). Therefore, diffusion leads to adoption, but this will be a growing, spiralling process where adoption will lead to further diffusion (Jones, 1963; Rogers, 1958; Rogers, 2003; Ryan & Gross, 1943).
In their foundational article on adoption of innovation, Ryan and Gross (1943) explore the ideas of thresholds of adoption among individuals. They found that adoption followed an irregular bell curve. In this process there were individuals who adopted innovations quicker than others, and further diffusion (and consequential adoption) came from connecting with others about their successes. Most influential was the connection and communication between neighbors in actual adoption and implementation of an innovation. This finding that neighbors were most influential may need to be modified with the adoption of telecommunications, but it suggests diffusion occurs among those who have regular interaction or who are able to easily see the consequences of adoption of new technology.

Rogers (1958, 2003) applied a five-category typology to individuals who adopted new technology: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Innovators were the first to adopt the technique, early adopters followed, and so forth. The characteristics of the later adopters are particularly interesting. They typically “rely heavily on their…acquaintances…for information and advice” (Jones, 1963, p. 393). Additionally, a late adopter is typically “of low social status, makes little use of mass media channels, and learns about most new ideas from peers via interpersonal channels” (Rogers, 2003, p. 22). This indicates there may be a larger share of strong ties in their social network, limiting the social network with regard to providing access to new perspectives and ways of receiving new information.

Rogers (2003) indicates a number of influences that may affect the adoption of an innovation. First is the concept of relative advantage, that an innovation must appear to be better than its alternatives in order to be adopted. Second, perceived compatibility with
“existing values, past experiences, and needs” (p. 240) is an important consideration in adopting an innovation. If an innovation is viewed as overly complex or difficult to understand, it will affect adoption negatively. Fourth, if an innovation could be tested first before full adoption, overall adoption increases. Finally, observability refers to the visibility of the outcomes of an innovation. The outcome will either negatively or positively affect adoption. Of note is that once someone is engaged in adoption, they may choose to not be in this adoption category (Wejnert, 2002). Being an adopter of innovation is not a permanent state; an individual can reject the innovative response after temporary utilization.

Rogers (2003) outlines three stages of implementation of innovation in an organization. The first stage is redefining and restructuring, where the innovation is adapted to the organization and the organization also begins to adapt because of the innovation. The second stage is clarifying, where people in the organization begin to understand what the innovation is, and how it will affect them. This stage occurs over a period of time. Finally, in the third stage of implementation, routinizing occurs, where the innovation becomes part of the identity of the organization and is no longer separate.

Figure 4 displays a representation of this third and final phase. The arrows at the end of the weak ties indicate the connections needed to be developed with others who have not adopted the innovation in order to further spread the innovation.
**Barriers to implementation.** There are a number of common barriers to the adoption of innovations. The first barrier is geography. Close physical proximity is associated with greater spread of information and innovative processes (Wejnert, 2002). Large distances would decrease the likelihood of diffusion. Second, increasing innovation adoption is also capital intensive (Kessler & Bierly, 2002). Innovation adoption may require new technologies, and other secondary adoptions (Wejnert, 2002). As such, adoption may not be financially feasible for a particular organization. However, this is not necessarily the case when the innovation is a new way of organizing or communicating. Third, the massive amount of information regarding an innovation may also pose a barrier. As innovation spreads, more information becomes available (Fischer, Arnold, & Gibbs, 1996), creating a “drinking from a fire hose” analogy. It is not the amount of information available, but the quality of the information that influences adoption (Fischer, Arnold, & Gibbs, 1996). Too much information (quantity) can at times lead to paralysis of the innovation adoption process, with an uncertainty of whom
to trust (Wejnert, 2002). Finally, cultural differences (which also relate to the social networks of the community) can also pose barriers to the implementation of innovation. Conservative cultures that historically take fewer risks, limit individual freedom, and devalue the importance of individual success over the success of the whole will typically be slower to adopt innovations (Wejnert, 2002). Additionally, a higher emphasis on tradition increases lag time of innovation adoption (Wejnert, 2002).

**Innovation Process Model Summary**

Figure 5 displays my innovation process model in its entirety. The dotted lines between the stages are meant to represent the permeable boundaries between them, because it is likely that these stages will not be distinct and that there will be blurring between them. Additionally, a process may need to return to a previous stage after receiving feedback. For example, if users provide feedback during the implementation phase that suggests a need for changing the innovation, the innovation process may need to move back to the Idea Formation stage before the (now modified) innovation could be further diffused and adopted.

![Innovation Conceptual Framework](image-url)
In this study, this innovation process model will serve as the conceptual model for this research. It will be applied to community level organizing to explore the potential for maximizing innovation potential in these processes. However, the above model draws primarily from the innovation literature. The discussion that follows situates this as a framework that can be applied in a community setting. First, in the identification of need phase, an individual most likely to have great personal stake within the community, whom the issue will directly affect will identify a need for change. However, it will need to be a person who is not so entrenched in the community or risk averse that he or she will not be able to recognize or act on the important issue or opportunity. The individual will likely need to operate outside of formal structures to create an innovative way of organizing to meet the perceived need. Once the individual realizes the need to act, as indicated in the innovation literature, he or she will likely first connect to trusted others to begin getting feedback about possibilities for action. These people may not be representative of very many social fields, due to the initial emphasis on close ties.

Second, if the individual receives positive feedback from these initial contacts, he or she will likely begin to move into the idea formation phase. The first step would be to seek greater input from contacts who may be able to provide connections to specific resources in the community, including municipal government, a grant program, non-profit or philanthropic organizations, or greater information about the identified need.

This input will likely be gained through a combination of additional friends (strong ties) and acquaintances (weak ties) within the community. This expansion also may occur through connections of members of the initial group first included in the
recognition of need phase. Ideally, these additional connections would be with people from across multiple social fields, as both the innovation and community development literatures indicated this enhances the opportunity for more positive outcomes. In practice, however, the representation may be limited due to the social networks of the initial people involved. In order to increase the potential for creative ideas that might address a community issue, individuals may need to develop new connections across multiple social fields within the community. The diversity of perspective, experience, and knowledge generated from these connections and input will assist the idea formation phase.

Third, as this organizing group moves through the idea formation phase, it will need to gain greater input and support from across the community as a whole. At this time, the goal should be to develop representation from all social fields within the community, to focus on development in community (e.g. efforts that address the issue) and of the community, development of the community field, the specialized social field that is specifically concerned with addressing issues and opportunities to increase community wellbeing (Wilkinson, 1999). Through this experience, the group may also connect, using weak ties, to individuals outside the community who may be able to provide additional support for moving the community organizing process forward. Additionally, other community organizing efforts may already be occurring within the community, and as the organizing group seeks greater information they may connect with these other efforts, potentially further strengthening the community field.

Finally, if there is broad community support to move forward, then the community organizing process should begin the implementation phase. During this time,
a smaller group of individuals dedicated to coordinating action will be required, as indicated by the innovation literature (Lester & Piore, 2004). Ideally they should have access to significant assets or knowledge of how to obtain resources in order to be able to take the ideas from the idea formation phase and create a plan for implementation in the community. This group should continue to communicate with the broader community, across social fields, while also gaining feedback on their actions, so that they can adjust the implementation plan accordingly. Once the plan is finalized, this smaller group will need to do wide outreach across the community field, implementing the plan accordingly, while also being flexible enough to adjust the plan during adoption, if needed.

My research uses this framework to analyze the structure of four community organizing processes, and the extent to which these processes result in the potential for developing innovative ideas that will meet the needs of their respective communities. While the communities’ focus is the ideas for handling an issue, what is of interest in this research is if innovation occurred within a community field, how communities organize differently to address a self-identified issue, and how this compares to the innovation framework previously described.

**Innovation within Community Settings**

There are several approaches that focus on the structure of human interaction aimed at catalyzing innovation within corporate and community settings. While these practices will not be the specific focus of this research, they help to demonstrate important principles for the context of community organizing in community development to stimulate innovative ideas. This section provides a brief overview of several of these
approaches, finishing with several key principles based upon this and the broader innovation literature, relating them to the process model previously presented.

**Private sector approaches for enabling innovation.** There are several specific prominent practices in private sector development aimed at catalyzing innovation and encouraging competitive advantage.

**Clusters and Networks.** Clustering refers to utilizing the geographic location of organizations to increase innovation through the sharing of resources and information, typically in the same or a similar industry (Bell, 2005; Brasier et al., 2007; Evers, 2008; Keeble & Nachum, 2002; Maskell, 2005). “Proximity increases a company’s innovative capacity when firms can share ideas, products, and services” (Evers, 2008, p. 5). This is a common practice in the corporate world, used to leverage local resources (Brasier et al., 2007) and potentially global market access (Keeble & Nachum, 2002). It is necessary that each organization contribute transparently and equally to ensure the viability of the system (Brasier et al., 2007). Bell (2005) found that a firm’s involvement in clusters, as well as the level of its involvement, increased its innovativeness (in other words, more involvement leads to more positive returns).

Networks are intertwined with clusters. Not to be confused with social networks previously mentioned, they specifically refer to a group of individuals or firms working together, with an emphasis on the connections between them (Powell & Grodal, 2004; Cowan, 2004; DeBresson & Amesse, 1991). A network, however, unlike a cluster, need not be solely located in one geographic area, but may include other organizations associated with a supply chain (vertical integration), or be organized between similar firms (horizontal integration) (Cowan, 2005).
**Incubators.** This model may be seen as a stronger form of both clusters and networking. In an incubator setting, there is typically one building, or even an open room, where a group of individuals rent space, share support services, and interact to catalyze innovation (Bergek & Norrman, 2008). There is also often the option for support in the form of education or training from the organizer of the incubator (Bergek & Norrman, 2008). This method is mainly used in the formation of start-ups, particularly in the technology industry (Etzkowitz, Carvalho de Mello, & Almeida, 2005; Bergek & Norrman, 2008; Tamasy, 2007). This practice is highly contested. While there is evidence that it may be beneficial to skill development of an individual entrepreneur, there are mixed signals as to how much return on investment the incubator brings to the surrounding community (Tavoletti, 2013).

**Hubs.** The previously described strategies focused on inter-firm connections for innovation. Hubs, however, refer to intra-organizational connections (Leifer, O’Connor & Rice, 2001). In a company, a hub facilitates and coordinates efforts between a number of different departments to lend new thinking to a problem or solution (Leifer, O’Connor & Rice, 2001). This process is based on coordination and intentionality, whereas many of the other models indicate a laissez-faire interaction process with little or no centralized facilitation.

**Alternative practices of enabling innovation.** In addition to the common private sector options, there are a number of innovation practices that are not traditionally used within the private sector due to a lack of focus on commercial production.

**Innovation hub.** An innovation hub, unlike a typical company hub, focuses on the cooperation of a number of actors with knowledge at the center (Youtie & Shapira,
An innovation hub functions like a network that enables knowledge sharing for innovation. This method is usually regionally focused, and often centered around a university (Youtie & Shapira, 2008). This enables the utilization of the so-called “triple helix,” where interaction is increased and encouraged between universities, industry/private sectors, and the government (Etzkowitz, Carvalho de Mello, & Almeida, 2005). The university “seeks to actively use knowledge to promote indigenous development and new capabilities in its region and beyond” (Youtie & Shapira, 2008, p. 1189).

**Collaborative circles.** This practice is not specific to any industry or area of development. This is a model described by Farrell (2001) for a process of innovation that transcends the traditional boundaries of disciplines. The boundary here is a common set of interests: “A collaborative circle is a primary group consisting of peers who share similar occupational goals and who, through long periods of dialogue and collaboration, negotiate a common vision that guides their work” (Farrell, 2001, p. 11). Such circles are typically informal, but the members hold one another accountable to perform in an egalitarian manner according to the interests of the group. The group enables creativity from its members by serving as a source of inclusivity for the consideration of ideas, no matter how impractical or improbable they may be.

**Third places.** Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) refer to “third places” as open spaces of social interaction enabling innovation and creativity. These can be anything from coffee shops to benches, and are used by people in a community to suspend typical hierarchical positions or boundaries. Third places do not have explicit agendas. They allow for connections that would not happen in more formal places. There is a sense of
equality and inclusiveness among the members, who are there of their own free will. These associations enable a freedom of expression, and engender safety of exploration through social conversation.

**Connection between private and public practices – Social Entrepreneurship**

A more recent and emerging field of study and focus for innovation is known as social entrepreneurship. This specific type of entrepreneurship is devoted to innovation for meeting societal needs (Dees & Economy, 2001; Mair, 2010; Nicholls, 2006). This practice serves as a potential way to connect private industry methods with social and nonprofit methods. While there are several emerging definitions of social entrepreneurship, “[t]he defining purpose of social entrepreneurship...is to effect social change by altering the social, economic and political day-to-day realities at the local level” (Mair, 2010, p.20). A social entrepreneur can be an individual or an enterprise, whether for-profit or non-profit, whose purpose is to act as a change agent in local communities (Christensen, Baumann, Ruggles, & Sadtler, 2006; Brouard & Larivet, 2010; Mair, 2010). Lyons (2013) documents several types of enterprises that are explicitly focused on social entrepreneurship, from the for-profit to the nonprofit (and including hybrids of the two).

Christensen, Baumann, Ruggles, and Sadtler (2006) term the type of innovation associated with social entrepreneurship as catalytic innovation, a type of disruptive innovation (see above). They list five activities of people associated with this type of innovation:

1. They create systemic social change through scaling and replication.
2. They meet a need that is either overserved (because the existing solution is
more complex than many people require) or not served at all.

3. They offer products and services that are simpler and less costly than existing alternatives and may be perceived as having a lower level of performance, but users consider them to be good enough.

4. They generate resources, such as donations, grants, volunteer manpower, or intellectual capital, in ways that are initially unattractive to incumbent competitors.

5. They are often ignored, disparaged, or even discouraged by existing players for whom the business model is unprofitable or otherwise unattractive and who, therefore, avoid or retreat from the market segment. (p. 96)

While much of the social entrepreneurship literature indicates a large scale for social entrepreneurship (societal in scope), innovative organizing efforts within communities that have a social purpose may also be considered social entrepreneurship.

**Key Principles From the Innovation Literature**

Five general principles emerge from the literature on these practices and the innovation literature that are relevant for the community context. The first principle is that **facilitation is important** in the innovation process, because it enables regular social interaction. The clusters model focuses on the interactions between firms, and specifically emphasizes the need to geographically locate near each other to enable innovation and remain competitive (Evers, 2008). Incubators are centralized around the sharing of a common space where interaction is high and skill development is enabled (Bergek & Normann, 2008). Hubs are spaces within a company where multiple units are able to interact with each other to enable innovation (Leifer, O’Connor & Rice, 2001).
Collaborative circles specifically form due to the proximity of individuals with a shared interest, and continue to focus on face-to-face meetings (Farrell, 2001). Third places are centered by definition around actual locations where interaction is enabled (Oldenburg, 1982).

Human interaction is therefore important to the innovation process, but innovation does not occur simply because humans interact. Instead, what is required is thoughtful facilitation of people across areas of difference, perspective, interests, and ability. Although a few of the studies indicate that new technologies provide the ability for organizations to connect, technology is generally not seen as central to the innovation process. Physical location and intentional interaction are greater enablers of the innovation process. This is consistent with community innovation occurring within the physical location of the community, but also highlights the importance of intentionally bringing people from across the community together to address the issues or opportunity facing the community. Less clear is who the facilitator of such an effort might be in a community. Should it be a trusted outsider, with no vested interest in the outcome, or a trusted local individual, with direct ties to the community and its successeses.

Second, **knowledge sharing is key**. Clusters (Brasier et al., 2007) and networks (Powell & Grodal, 2004) function when the individuals and organizations share openly their knowledge and innovation, are transparent about their involvement, and contribute equally. As Brasier et al. (2007) stated, “…firms compete cooperatively and they cooperate competitively.” In other words, when firms involved in a cluster collaborate they are more competitive. Hubs too function around the notion of equal sharing, from
multiple departments within an organization, relinquishing turf issues (Leifer, O’Connor, & Rice, 2001).

Finally, collaboration circles emphasize the sharing of information across individuals’ respective skillsets (Farrell, 2001). The ability and need to share information and ideas is key to creating innovation. Knowledge sharing highlights the importance of transparency within a community setting. This may require a bit slower of a process, requiring the greater public to be informed of what is occurring, gathering feedback at public meetings or through communication technologies. Additionally, it is important that the representatives of organizations involved in community-based efforts share their knowledge and information across the network of individuals and organizations involved in organizing efforts. This will ensure that a community can maximize its assets within community organizing processes, while being transparent amongst the organizations and individuals involved in those efforts.

Third, trust is necessary for innovation. Trust enables open and transparent knowledge sharing between individuals, firms and organizations (De Jong & Woolthuis, 2008). These firms must trust that their partners will not take the shared information and use it for their sole benefit. Additionally, trust is needed for individuals to adopt innovative practices, to ensure that using a certain new practice will not put the firm or individual at a disadvantage (Agarwal, 1983; Pannell et al., 2006, Pound, 2008). In the community setting, trust will be essential. Those involved with community organizing efforts are likely family members, friends, representatives of organizations, and other residents that will remain in the community for an extended period of time. If a solid platform of trusting relationships between people or organizations involved in community
is created, it can be a vehicle for creating lasting connections within the community field for future organizing efforts. This may require repairing old rifts within a community, intentionally recreating trust that may have been lost.

Fourth, the reputation of those involved in the process of innovation matters. Innovative methods are passed through organizational or inter-firm networks via knowledge transfer (Cowan, 2004; Evers, 2008; Powell & Grodal, 2004) and through the social networks of individuals (Valente, 1996). Additionally, implementation of innovative practices shared between people or firms may only occur if a certain number of others adopt it (Valente, 1996). The reputation of those individuals spreading the information about an innovation is as important as the efficacy of the innovation, a poor reputation or poor previous history can negatively affect the spread or use of an innovation. This may mean that the person facilitating community innovation may affect the success of the organizing efforts. In communities where residents can have a long history, their reputation among others within a community may be a large hindrance to community innovation or it could lead it to be a great success. Being mindful of this will be important.

Fifth, inclusiveness and diversity are important when examining how innovation occurs on the individual level. In this context, an inclusive environment is defined as the ability for a group of individuals to consider action regarding new ways of approaching situations, alternative ideas for solutions, and ideas beyond current conventions. Additionally, inclusive environments imply that membership of the group is open to all types of people.
In collaborative circles, for example, there is a specific need for all perspectives and even odd ideas to be considered to enable individual creativity and innovation (Farrell, 2001). Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) argue that in third places, it is paramount that barriers are broken down and that all types of people are welcomed, to encourage a vibrancy not seen in other spaces. By using new trains of thought, perspectives, or ideas in ways previously not considered, new, innovative products and outcomes can result.

This principle is in line with both the innovation and community field literatures with regards to community organizing. In community innovation, it may be easy for those involved to connect with familiar individuals. However, intentionally facilitating connections across difference allows for greater access to assets (human and otherwise), perspective, and ideas. Doing so may mean an individual may bring a new frame to an issue based upon their individual experience, allowing for a new insight. Developing new connections across a community to ensure diversity and inclusiveness is difficult; it requires time and great amounts of effort, but doing so will help to facilitate greater opportunities for innovation in the community setting.

Facilitation, open knowledge sharing, trust, a positive reputation, and inclusiveness are all vital to the process of innovation. These elements are essential to the success of the process of innovation, and will need to be considered when analyzing organizing processes that foster innovation within a community setting.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has brought together the community and innovation literatures, using social network theory to map out the social interactions in the theoretical concepts. Both
community development and innovation require intentional facilitation for positive outcomes, and both processes are the strongest when people connect across areas of difference. When applying the innovation process model presented in a community setting, the members of the community may see the outcomes from that model as the most important innovation, as they are interested in addressing issues in their community.

However, using the innovation process model as a framework for community organizing may itself be the most important innovation for the community, as it provides new ways for community members to connect across the community to meet their needs now and in the future. During this organizing process, it will be important to be mindful of the principles for practice presented. These principles, intentional facilitation, open knowledge sharing, trust, reputation, and inclusiveness, have the potential to affect the context of the community organizing process. The next chapter on methods outlines how four community processes were analyzed according to the community innovation process framework developed here to offer suggestions for future organizing processes that may maximize their greatest potential for successful innovation processes.
Chapter 3

Methods
As indicated in Chapter 1, I have two main objectives in this research. The first is to document rural community organizing processes for community development, and compare them to the innovation conceptual framework described in the previous chapter. My second objective is to examine the role of social networks in these community organizing processes, in order to suggest potential modifications to these networks to more effectively catalyze innovative ideas to address community-identified issues. By pursuing these objectives, it is my hope to more clearly link the innovation and community development/organizing literatures. In so doing, new insight for communities seeking new ways to organize to meet their needs may be provided.

I use a case study approach to achieve the research objectives. I have selected four communities that have applied to and participated in the Main Streets Program offered through the National Trust for Historic Preservation as my case studies. This program requires communities to work through community organizing processes before making application to the program. The advantage to this requirement is that participation in the Main Street Program indicates a community-wide process should have occurred, allowing for the opportunity to document and map the social networks involved in this process.

I pursue two central questions in this research. The first question addresses the first objective: What organizing processes do rural communities use as they prepare to apply for the Main Street Program? The second question corresponds to both the first and second objective: What role do social networks play in community organizing processes as the communities prepare to apply to join the Main Streets Program?
I used qualitative research methods to conduct this study, specifically a comparative case study methodology. Qualitative research methods are appropriate for this project because the data required to achieve the objectives are not readily available in any other format (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative methods require a researcher to engage closely with the subject of study, requiring contact with multiple individuals, situations, and experiences (Goodwin and Horowitz, 2002). In this case, deconstructing community organizing processes and the social networks of community members required a level of nuance only retrievable through direct interaction. I drew from over seven years of my own experience in community engagement and development to effectively interface with individuals in the four communities I studied. Direct contact with subjects ensured the most accurate representation of the communities, their contexts, and their community organizing processes.

A case study examines a bounded experience, a specific context or phenomenon, focusing the scope of the study (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009). Using multiple cases provides the opportunity to perform cross-case synthesis, where themes from each case would be compared, with an opportunity to construct, if needed, additional themes that connect the cases (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). A comparative case-study approach is most appropriate for an explanatory process that requires a holistic picture of complex changes occurring in each site over time (Yin, 2009).

My research applies the existing innovation literature to a community context, and a case study allows for in-depth exploration of the community organizing process to be analyzed in relation to the innovation conceptual framework. A case study also provides the opportunity to describe the community members’ use of social networks throughout
the process in each site. Selecting cases that are similar units of analysis provided greater ability to compare across cases (Yin, 2009). Therefore, the unit of analysis for each case is a rural community. Each case includes a detailed description of the community organizing process and the use of community members’ social networks during the process, including the history and the chronological occurrences of each case.

Below I detail the methods I used for constructing the case study narratives and then for analyzing the cases. These methods follow those proposed by Yin (2009) for comparative case studies. I follow with a discussion of validity, generalizability, and limitations; ethical concerns, data management, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) review and approval for research using human subjects; and my plan for sharing my research results.

**Methods for Constructing Case Study Narratives**

Multiple-case methodology requires a narrative, a detailed account of each case, be constructed (Yin, 2009). The first step when constructing case study narratives for analysis is to bound the case, or to identify what exactly would constitute a case (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2007). For the purposes of this study, a case will be bounded by both place and time.

First, rural municipalities will be used as the basis for identifying the study sites. A municipality is a level of governance that is tied to a specific geographic place. It provides a specific site location that is approved by state government; data for the entity are measured and reported by the US Census Bureau (United State Census Bureau, 2012). This study, however, will not be limited to phenomena within the geographic
boundaries of the municipality. There may be individuals involved in the community organizing process who are located outside the municipality. Therefore, the case will be bounded by affiliation to the community organizing process occurring within these municipalities. This provides flexibility to comprehensively involve both those who are and are not residents of the municipality as long as they are engaged in a community organizing process that is focused on the issues and opportunities pertaining to a specific municipality.

This study is focused on understanding the innovation in a process of organizing that leads to further innovation in ideas to meet perceived needs of a community. This requires identifying communities that have worked through such a process. I focused on the Main Street Program, administered through the National Trust for Historic Preservation, as a way to identify communities. The Main Street Program was selected for three reasons. First, it requires communities to engage in a comprehensive, cross-community process of identifying community needs and developing a plan for addressing those needs before submitting an application for participation. The program requires that development be a community effort rather than something that could be instituted only by a governmental office. Second, the Main Street Program keeps data and records on the participating communities, making the construction of the case narrative more comprehensive through the use of this information. Finally, the program specifically includes rural communities as participants (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2014).

The second case boundary will be time. Case studies will begin with the initiation of the community organizing process, that is, when community members recognized the
need to act to address community issues, in this case, the need to improve their 
community well-being. The cases conclude with the community members’ formal 
application to, acceptance by and adoption of the Main Street Program.

**Site Selection**

After determining case conceptual boundaries, the actual sites must be chosen. I 
followed a replication design, which examines several cases that represent the same 
thoretical processes of interest (Yin, 2009): in this instance a community organizing 
process. For this study, I used four sites that participate in the Main Street Program, two 
in the state of Michigan and two from Pennsylvania. This design provides an opportunity 
to account for state-level influences on the organizing process. I can therefore better 
understand greater nuances in the organizing processes that may be due to influences 
from factors external to the community.

Michigan and Pennsylvania were chosen for several reasons. First, they share 
similar historical contexts of agriculture, extraction, and manufacturing. Second, each 
state has a large rural population. Third, each state has a large number of communities 
participating in the Main Street Program (the full listing is available in Appendices A and 
B). Finally, in practical terms, each state was accessible to me because of physical 
location, professional and personal connections, and budget.

The sites chosen from the listing of Main Street were located in nonmetropolitan, 
micropolitan counties, a US Office of Management and Budget designation used by the 
United States Department of Agriculture. This distinction refers to counties outside of the 
boundaries of metropolitan areas, but with one or more urban areas with 10,000 – 49,999
people or economically tied to the central county with an urban area of 10,000 – 49,999 people through worker commuting (USDA ERS, 2014). The municipalities selected are of similar population size and located in counties of similar population size, and have a similar median age and income to ensure that communities were comparable for analysis.

Initially I intended to utilize sites located in nonmetropolitan, noncore counties, this distinction refers to counties that are not considered part of a metropolitan area and have no urban area of 50,000 or more (USDA ERS, 2014). However, the sites that were of this distinction in Michigan were not readily accessible due to their remote locations, which would increase costs of data collection. In both states, sites were chosen to which travel would not be cost-prohibitive, due to the project’s overall budget.

Finally, within each state, physical distance between sites was maximized, in order to prevent complication of analysis by the potential overlap of social networks between the communities. Therefore, the social networks assessed were more likely to be uniquely associated with each place. Identifying sites that were of similar population and median age that were geographically distant, yet accessible according to budget and time restrictions, proved to be difficult. I utilized similar sites within states, while trying not to vary too largely across states, though the difference between states was a noted limitation.

I also took into consideration when the communities became part of the Main Street Program through information available either through the state-level or community-level Main Street Program websites. Portland, Michigan and Titusville, Pennsylvania were two of the first communities to apply to be part of the Main Street Program in their state, whereas Blissfield, Michigan and Clearfield, Pennsylvania were
more recent (in the last 5 years) to apply to be part of the Main Street Program. This was
to see if the time frame of the application within the state’s institution of the Main Street
Program would affect the community organizing processes within and across states. Due
to the changes in the program requirements for these states over time, I wanted to explore
if this would change the communities’ organizing processes.

Finally, these sites were chosen through an examination of websites of the state-
level and community-level Main Street Programs. Through these data, I was able to
determine that the Main Street Program was adopted through a community-level process,
and not merely instituted through municipal government.

Table 1 provides the four chosen sites with demographic information listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Blissfield</td>
<td>3,279</td>
<td>99,892</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>3,914</td>
<td>63,941</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>44,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Clearfield</td>
<td>6,113</td>
<td>81,184</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>30,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Titusville</td>
<td>5,431</td>
<td>87,598</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>26,903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2012 Population estimates
Data downloaded September 13, 2014.

Archival Data Collection

In order to properly contextualize each site, I begin each case narrative with a
historical and contemporary perspective on the community. Current events can only be
appropriately understood when the past context is known (Sanders, 1958). Archival data
 compilation is necessary to construct the historical setting of the case (Cresswell, 2007). I
collected data that provided descriptions of the community prior to the community
organizing process. These data were utilized to provide the historical context of each site, situating the recognition of a need for change by the community members. I also include a contemporary perspective of the town, including demographic data and other relevant information to present an accurate representation of the current situation.

Historical and demographic data from publicly available resources for each site were used. I began with information available on websites, including data from the U.S. Census Bureau, local newspapers, and local historical societies. I then travelled to the sites to obtain additional historical data, such as written histories, to fill in remaining gaps. I also included information about community history from the key informant interviews as necessary.

Community Organizing Process Data Collection

In the case narrative for each site, I detail the community organizing process. As mentioned above, this process is bounded temporally at one end by the recognition of a need for action and at the other by the official application and adoption by community members into the Main Streets Program. I use key informant interviews to provide insight from those actors involved in the community organizing process. These interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. Each individual was asked a pre-established set of questions, but flexibility to ask other questions was allowed, if necessary, to gain further insights not predicted prior to the interview (Creswell, 2007). This format also provided the opportunity for the interviewee to provide additional information they felt was relevant to the topic (Creswell, 2007), allowing for more complete collection of information.
I interviewed the Main Street Program state-level contact for the case study communities to gain a better understanding of the overall Main Streets process, and to gather specific information on each community. This individual was identified through contact information on the Main Street Program’s state level website. I also interviewed the community contact individual for Main Streets. Each community must employ a Main Street manager who is responsible for coordinating the program. These individuals were identified from the contact information located on either the state-level Main Street Program website or through their community-level Main Street Program website. From the Main Street community contact, I employed referral sampling to identify additional community members involved in the community organizing process.

Referral or chain referral sampling refers to the inclusion of individuals referred by current participants who share common characteristics of interest to a research project (Beirnacki and Waldorf, 1981). I asked the Main Streets community contact to identify the core group of individuals initially involved in the organizing process. I also asked for records of the process in each site as part of my archival data collection, and I utilized this to identify additional individuals to interview beyond those that were referred to by the Main Street community contact. As I interviewed these participants, I asked them to refer me to other individuals they identified as essential to the process, both people who initiated the organizing process and those that became involved in the process as it proceeded chronologically. I selected individuals who had the potential to provide the greatest insight into the site’s organizing process (Yin, 2009), as identified by the participants themselves.
I continued interviews until I reached a data saturation point, when interviewing additional individuals provided limited or no new insights into the process (Creswell, 2007). In this research, data saturation occurred when redundancy became evident in the community organizing process steps and in the social networks of the individuals involved in the process. The full listing of number of participants by location is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Participants by Location**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>State of Michigan</th>
<th>Blissfield, MI</th>
<th>Portland, MI</th>
<th>State of Pennsylvania</th>
<th>Clearfield, PA</th>
<th>Titusville, PA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview questions for each of the four types of informants (state-level Main Streets contact, community-level Main Streets contact, local citizen initial core group, and local citizens involved later in the process) can be found in Appendix C. The content of the interviews asked participants to discuss the chronological order of the organizing process including who the participants of the organizing processes were and the social fields they represented, their role within the community, and the successes and limitations to their participation in the Main Street Program. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing me to have flexibility to ask additional questions if participant answers were unclear. All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed.

I also asked the state-level and community-level Main Streets contacts for documentation of the activities related to the community organizing process for a more complete understanding of the process. This documentation took the form of application materials and meeting notes.
I managed the transcripts by grouping all files digitally by location. I organized the data into a chronological order for each transcript, and then combined them within each site. I added in additional data from the archival data collection process and the documentation provided by the interview participants.

Creation and Analysis of Case Study Narratives

From these sources of information, I constructed narratives that illustrated the community organizing process in each community in chronological order. Included in this narrative is an analysis of the social networks associated with the process, taking into account a listing of the individuals involved; how they were connected to one another; the groups in the community with which they were associated; what their contribution was to the process; when and for how long they became involved, and their level of involvement; and if they were considered internal or external to the community. I separated these narratives by state, providing an explanation of how the Main Streets Program was instituted in each state. Each community case narrative provided an in-depth representation of the organizing process, arranged for analysis into the same format as my innovation conceptual framework.

I then performed a cross-case analysis of these narratives for each study site (Yin, 2009). Within each case, I analyzed the organizing process according to my conceptual framework, utilizing this as a coding scheme to analyze the community’s organizing process stages to the innovation framework stages (identification of need, idea formation, and implementation) to meet my first objective and answer my first research question. Using these data, as well as the additional social network information collected from the
interviews, I compared my findings to the social network structures in the innovation framework to meet my second objective and answer my second research question. Once this was completed, I compared cases within each state, highlighting similarities and differences between them. I then used these analyses to compare state similarities and differences at the state-level. Finally, I compared themes across all four cases to identify patterns and differences across all four sites.

**Validity, Generalizability, and Limitations**

The main threats to validity in this study are inaccurate information provided by research participants, researcher bias, and selection bias. First, as in any study, the information provided by the research participants has the potential to be inaccurate, whether intentionally or unintentionally. To address this, I used a triangulation method, wherein I verified each participant’s account by comparing it both with information from other participants and with general information collected about the community (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Not interviewing all individuals involved in the community organizing process had the potential to threaten the validity of the information provided by the research participants, as details of the process may have been left out or inaccurately reported. However, the participant interviews and the archival data collection provided redundancy of information of the community organizing processes, strengthening the accuracy of the results. If I found discrepancies of the collected information, I asked clarifying questions in a second, follow up interview with key informants.

Second, researcher bias could also affect the validity of the study through misinterpretation or exposing participants to my own bias (Maxwell, 2005). Throughout
my research I acted with utmost professionalism, and actively considered how my presence affected the research sites and potential outcomes. I minimized exposing my participants to any of my interests and bias by focusing on the interview questions and their experiences. To further combat the threat of researcher bias, I made explicit my own biases with the research in my introduction chapter including my own interest in finding ways to help communities, especially those in rural areas. Additionally, this helped to expose any potential issues with my interpretation of the findings. I am familiar with and have engaged in community development and organizing practice. This provided much insight into the process of community organizing that is outside the realm of theory, specifically how people interact within community organizing processes and the social networks utilized to engage a wide array of stakeholders. This knowledge had the potential to influence who I approached for interviews as well as how I interpreted the data from my interviews. However, I put aside my own interests, objectively utilizing the conceptual framework to analyze my data.

Finally, there is selection bias associated with the geographical location of this study, as well as the relatively small number of potential and actual participants. The geographic regions are fairly limited in scope, and opening up to other regions may provide greater nuance to the outcomes of this research. However, this study can be used as a platform for future studies, which will test the findings and continue to add to the body of knowledge associated with community organizing processes.

With regards to generalizability of this study, the goal of this study and of qualitative methods more generally, is not to provide a sampling representative to the general population (Maxwell, 2005). Instead, the goal of this study was to examine a
specific theoretical concept through the cases of carefully selected sites. Therefore, this study aims to add greater nuance and depth to knowledge in community organizing and innovation theory. The ability to generalize from this study is in the theoretical realm, with the ability to apply these theories and continue to test them through further research initiatives (Yin, 2009)

One limitation of this study is that the potential sites in nonmetropolitan, micropolitan designated counties in Michigan have higher median household incomes than those in Pennsylvania, which may distort the ability to leverage local economic assets in the community organizing process. The data from the interviews reflected very similar answers. When comparing case studies between states, I noted this in my analysis. Second, due to the way the Main Street Program is organized, where one individual in each town is the contact for the program, I was unable to utilize multiple starting contacts in the communities as recommended by Beirnacki and Waldorf (1981). This had the potential to limit my interview participants to one subgroup in the community network. To combat this limitation, I utilized the records of the organizing processes in each site to connect with individuals that represented the core individuals associated with the community organizing process over time as well as the referrals from the interview participants.

Third, there were relatively few individuals available for interviews in the Titusville case study, due to the long length of time between the organizing process and the data collection for this research (approximately 25 years). I nevertheless feel confident in the data collected from my interviews, and that it is an accurate representation of Titusville’s organizing process. Finally, the social network data for all
communities were not comprehensive enough to perform formal social network analysis. The data were complete enough, however, to allow for analysis of the people involved in the community organizing process and how that collection of people changed over time.

**IRB, Ethical Concerns, and Data Management**

All appropriate Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) compliance documents were filed, and I did not begin my study until IRB approval was obtained. I completed all IRB and Human Subjects trainings required.

The ethical concern for this research is to ensure anonymity of the informants and research participants. While the data and subject of this study are of public processes, participants were concerned with being identified as the sources of information. Therefore, great care was taken to ensure that quotations and data would not be able to be traced back to participants. The sites are identified by their actual names, due to the public nature of these community organizing processes and their participation in a public, national program. However, individuals from these sites were given pseudonyms, and all of their identifying information was stripped from the data. The case study narratives refer to quotations without listing the pseudonyms of the informants, as individuals within the sites likely would be able to identify the informants, even with pseudonyms, through their roles in the community organizing processes.

With regard to data management, all identifying information is kept in a password-protected file. All electronic files associated with the study are kept on a password-protected flash drive. All participants signed a consent form that fully explained their role in the study, the focus of the study, and the uses of the data. This
consent form may be found in Appendix D. The study was voluntary and all participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants did not receive remuneration for their participation. The flash drive with the electronic content, print materials utilized in the case study creation, and paper consent forms are stored in a secured location.

**Sharing of Research Products**

The results of this project will be shared publicly through a comprehensive outreach plan. I will share my results first with my dissertation committee and department through my dissertation defense. I will then communicate my results in articles for publication in peer-reviewed, discipline-relevant journals. I will also present and participate in relevant conferences and workshops to provide a wider communication of my results. I will share all results with the communities and individuals participating in the study, through a short report for each site explaining the key findings and information relevant for catalyzing innovation in community processes. An electronic copy of my dissertation also will be provided. Finally, I will share my results with the Main Streets Program, both at the local and state levels, by providing the Program with an electronic copy of my dissertation and the short reports prepared for each study site.
Chapter 4

Michigan Case Studies
In this chapter, I describe the two Michigan case studies of Blissfield and Portland. These case study narratives provide an overview of the organizing processes in these communities. Greater detail regarding goals, processes, and feelings of participants is found in the analysis presented in Chapter 6. To create these case study narratives, I utilized the data collected in the key informant interviews. I compiled information across several key informants, using the data collected from the questions asked about how the community organized to become part of the Main Street program (question 4 in the community level main streets contact interview questions; question 3 in the initial core group questions; and question 2 in the citizens involved along the way questions; these interview questions can be found in Appendix 4).

Additionally, I compiled data from the key informant interviews to develop the social networks associated with these community organizing processes over time (question 4 in the community level main streets contact interview questions; questions 4 and 5 in the initial core group questions and the citizens involved along the way questions). Informants found it difficult to recall all people involved in the process, and at what point in time they were involved in the process. But, informants were able to identify many of the individuals who were core to the efforts as well as what social fields across the community were represented. Due to the incomplete nature of the data, I provide a diagram that represents the structure of social network connections throughout the process and the social fields represented rather than a formal social network analysis.

I begin by providing a brief historical context for the state of Michigan, followed by a description of Michigan’s work with the Main Street Program. I then present the two case studies. Each case study includes a historical context of the site, a snapshot of
current economic and demographic conditions, a description of the community organizing process, and the structure of the organizing process.

**Michigan: A Historical Context**

The state of Michigan has a rich historical narrative. The Michigan Legislature (2002) has compiled a history of the state, from which this section draws for the next several paragraphs. Originally settled by the French in the early 1600s, the area was populated by several Native American tribes. Both Native American and French cultures influence the state to the present day and live on in artifacts such as city names. Michigan became part of the United States in 1796 as a portion of the Northwest Territory, after the US overcame British occupation of the area. It formally became a state in 1837, after settling border disputes with Ohio and adding the land of the state’s Upper Peninsula.

Michigan’s economy is largely associated with manufacturing due to the state’s long involvement with the automotive industry. Long before the development of the automobile; however, Michigan’s first industries were based on natural resources, with a heavy reliance on fur trading, copper and iron mining, lumber, and agriculture. Access to the Great Lakes for shipping goods was key in the development of these and subsequent industries.

As the state continued to develop its infrastructure, the population expanded drastically, largely through immigration. Waves of German, Dutch, Irish, and Scandinavian immigrants shaped the cultural heritage of Michigan, while also providing the labor force for the fledgling automotive industry. At the beginning of the 20th century, Michigan’s economy changed from being based on natural resource extraction to
being centered on manufacturing. This industrial development sparked great population
booms in urban areas by the 1930s, especially in the Detroit, Flint, and Grand Rapids
regions. The 1940s were a peak of success for the automotive industry in Michigan, with
60% of the world’s automobiles being manufactured in the state. At this time, labor
unions were gaining strength, shaping the relationship of workers and business owners
not only in Michigan but also across the nation.

The 1950s was the most prosperous decade for Michigan, and during this time the
population growth in the state was the third highest in the country. The tourism industry
also grew to be a significant economic driver for the state. In the 1960s, while also facing
cultural issues and civil rights clashes, the state’s general economic decline began largely
due to increased global competition. In the 1970s and 1980s, the automotive industry
struggled due to OPEC embargoes as well as increasing industrial globalization. The
automotive industry suffered again as the price of oil increased in the 2000s. Because of
Michigan’s heavy reliance upon the automotive industry, the state has experienced high
rates of unemployment in recent decades, leading to a large amount of out-migration.
Michigan was the only state that lost population between the years 2000 and 2010
(Mackun & Wilson, 2011). The future may be brighter due to the possible recovery of the
automotive industry; it has experienced recent successes and increases in demand for
products and jobs.

Current Demographic and Economic Snapshot of Michigan

According to the US Census Bureau (2014), Michigan’s population is estimated
to be 9,895,622 as of July 1, 2013, with a median age of 38.9. The racial makeup of the
state is predominantly white (76.2%), followed in order of percentage by African American, non-Hispanic (14.0%), Hispanic (3.9%), all other races (3.3%), and Asian, non-Hispanic (2.6%) (Michigan Economic Development Corporation, 2012). Nationally, as of July 1, 2013, the median age was 38.5, and the country’s racial make up is predominantly white (63.7%), followed in order of share of the population by Hispanic (16.3%), African American, non-Hispanic (12.2%), Asian, non-Hispanic (4.7%), and all other races (3.1%) (US Census (2014).

The top employers in Michigan by industry are government (15.9%), health care and social assistance (14.0%), manufacturing (13.5%), retail trade (11.1%), and accommodation and food services (8.5%), with a statewide average household income of $45,131 (Michigan Economic Development Corporation, 2012). The top industries by contribution to Gross Regional Product are manufacturing (17%), government (12%), health care and social assistance (10%), professional, scientific, and technical services (8%), and finance and insurance (8%) (Michigan Economic Development Corporation, 2012).

**Michigan Structure for Main Street Program**

The process by which a state institutes its Main Street Program provides an essential part of the context for the community organizing in each local community. This section provides an explanation of those key aspects of the Main Street Program that are unique to Michigan, as well as of the governmental structures associated with instituting similar programs. The data provided for this section are from my archival information research as well as from key informant interviews (questions 1 and 4 from the state level
Main Street contact interview questions and question 2 from the community level Main Street contact interview questions found in Appendix C).

Michigan began offering the Main Street program in the late 1980s, but due to a change in governors, the program did not remain a focus of the state’s administration and became defunct after approximately two years. However, individuals in Oakland County in the eastern part of the state and the city of Detroit found the program to be beneficial to their communities, and filed a separate charter to be a certifying program in 2000 (Main Street Oakland County, 2014). This charter is for a county-level program called Main Street Oakland County, which is currently active in nineteen communities (Main Street Oakland County, 2014). In 2003, under the direction of Governor Jennifer Granholm, Michigan re-established a state-level Main Street Program called Michigan Main Street Center (referred to hereafter as the Center). This means that both Oakland County and the State of Michigan have the ability to certify communities as Main Street communities in the state of Michigan. Both charters are still active, and the Center has a standing agreement with Main Street Oakland County to not become involved with any communities in Oakland County or the city of Detroit. When I refer to Michigan’s Main Street program, I will only be referring to the state-level program, the Center.

The Center was originally instituted through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), a governmental agency charged with developing and marketing the state’s economy (Michigan Economic Development Corporation, 2014). However, in 2005 it was relocated administratively to the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), home of numerous community and economic development initiatives, where it remains today. MSHDA has stable financing programs
and revenue streams, and relies very little on general fund money from the state. No general fund money is utilized to institute the Center; its funding comes entirely from MSDHA revenue.

State charters are allowed to customize how they institute the Main Street Program in their state. Although the program began only with full Main Street certification, Michigan communities may now progress through three levels of membership, added in 2005. Currently, communities interested in the Main Street Program must initially apply for Associate Level membership through the Center; this application is very minimal and merely indicates general interest in the Main Streets Program approach. At this level, communities are not yet certified as “Main Street communities.” They do however gain access to Center training programs, hosted in current member communities across the state, that aim to build capacity in the communities to meet the requirements set up by the National Main Street Center. Associate Level communities must send individuals to a training program provided by the Center by the end of their first year as an associate member. There are currently 23 Michigan communities affiliated with the Center at the Associate Level.

At the end of the first year, a community may decide if it wants to formally adopt the Main Street Program approach, and it can decide either to continue on with an additional year of training or apply to be a Select Member. To reach this level, a community must put together an extensive application that demonstrates its capacity to be successful as a Main Street designated community. It must present its application to the Center in Lansing, Michigan. Typically, more than ten communities apply for Select Member status each year, although the Center only accepts three applications per year.
This application process represents the end of the timeline for my case studies in Michigan, as this indicates that an organizing process has occurred.

Once at the Select Level, a community is designated as a Main Street community at both the state and national level. The Center works with a community for five years at this level. During this period communities are eligible for more advanced trainings on the Main Street Four Point Approach, detailed in the introduction chapter, as well as application-based services and grants. Select Level communities must maintain certain standards and requirements throughout all five years, reporting evidence to the Center. If they do not, the Center will require them to work through a remediation process, with dedicated assistance from Center staff.

At the end of five years at the Select Level (and as early as year three, based upon performance), a community may elect to apply to Master Level status to maintain its Main Street affiliation. Master Level communities are still eligible for all of the services at the Select Level, but they do not have as strict reporting obligations. They must still maintain the standards of the Main Street Program, however, and will be required to go into a remediation program if they do not. Additionally, Master Level communities serve as mentors to Associate Level communities. Master Level communities have the choice to renew their affiliation every two years indefinitely.

Community participation in the Michigan Main Street Program does not come with funding; the local community must provide all funding for its program. At the Select Level, communities are required to hire a Main Street Manager to coordinate the efforts of their Main Street Program. The National Center requires communities to designate a specific Main Street District within the community, generally a portion of the historic
downtown that the community aims to preserve and for which it plans to develop a future vision.

Main Street districts are typically located within a local community’s Downtown Development Authority (DDA) district, the economic center of a municipality, and the DDA becomes the administrative home for the local Main Street Program. In Michigan, a DDA is run by a group of individuals, typically appointed by the city’s council, at least half of whom are required by state law to own a business in the DDA district. DDAs receive tax dollars from the businesses in the DDA district through one of two funding mechanisms. The first is through levying a millage on the properties in the DDA district, up to two mills. The second option is to utilize Tax Increment Financing (TIF). To do so, a city must put together a TIF plan, which establishes a baseline assessment of property taxes in the DDA district. These baseline level funds are allocated to the city, library, and county. As the city grows and the assessment of property taxes grows beyond the baseline level, any taxes collected above the baseline level are allocated to the DDA and utilized to fund initiatives of the DDA. These funds then typically help to support the salary of the Main Street Manager and Main Street initiatives. The Main Street program may also supplement this funding with additional revenue generating efforts such as charging fees for events or donations from businesses.

When a community joins the Main Streets Program, existing DDA activities are often folded into the local Main Streets Program. There is often no real distinction between the DDA and the Main Streets Program other than that the DDA remains an advisory board to the Main Streets Program in the community. If a community does not have an existing DDA or other local mechanism to coordinate a Main Streets Program,
the community must form a 501c3, non-profit organization and raise money to fund Main Street Initiatives and the hiring of a manager. Of the 19 Main Street designated communities in Michigan, only two are non-profits of this type.

**Blissfield Case Study**

This section outlines the Blissfield Case Study. It was included because it was a recent applicant to the Main Street program. The application indicated it was a community-driven process, and that the program was not forced upon the community by a local government. It outlines the historical narrative of Blissfield, a current snapshot of the community, the organizing process in Blissfield, and finishes with a summary of the process that delineates the social networks within the process.

**Blissfield Historical Narrative**

This historical narrative relies upon data collected in my archival data research as well as my key informant interviews in Blissfield (question 1 in the community level Main Street contact, citizens in the initial core group, and citizens involved along the way questions found in Appendix C). The archival data used is from the texts referenced throughout this section as well as the applications from Blissfield’s Main Street applications. The village of Blissfield is located in the southeastern corner of the state of Michigan. It is geographically located between several large population centers: it is 18 miles from Adrian, population 20,861; 26 miles from Toledo, Ohio, population 282,313; 49 miles from Ann Arbor, population 117,025; and 68 miles from Detroit, population
688,701 (distance was determined by Google Maps (2014) and population was determined by the US Census (2014)). In Figure 6, Blissfield is designated by the red pin.

![Map of Blissfield, Michigan](http://maps.google.com)

Figure 6. Map of Blissfield, Michigan
Source: Google Maps (retrieved September 13, 2014 from http://maps.google.com)

Henry Bliss founded Blissfield in 1824, on swampy, forested land on the banks of the River Raisin (Barringer, 2014; Lindquist, 2000). The growth of the settlement was slow at first, but by the mid-1800s, the population of the village had risen to 466 (Lindquist, 2000). At this time, local residents began draining the swamps and clearing the forest to make way for agricultural production. The lumber industry, however, was the main economic driver in Blissfield, with several thriving lumberyards and a large stave factory, which in 1871 produced over half a million broom handles (Lindquist,
During this time, Blissfield gained railroad lines, which also drove commerce (Barringer, 2014; Lindquist, 2000). As the lumber industry declined in the 1880s, Blissfield further established its agricultural industry, with a huge emphasis on animal production (Lindquist, 2000).

The early 1900s saw the development of a sugar beet plant (Lindquist, 2000). By 1910, the population of Blissfield had risen to 1410 (Linquist, 2000). The sugar beet plant, along with a burgeoning fur industry at the turn of the 20th century, fueled growth in Blissfield through the mid-twentieth century (Barringer, 2014; Lindquist, 2000). Blissfield had the largest fur vault in the Midwest at this time. Manufacturing expanded in the 1950s, including refrigeration unit production, canneries, a grain mill, and an agricultural equipment factory (Lindquist, 2000). However, in the mid-1950s, the sugar beet processing plant closed, and the rail lines through town were also shut down (Lindquist, 2000). Nevertheless, manufacturing continued to expand throughout the 1960s until the late 1970s, and the town’s population grew to 3,107 by 1980 (Lindquist, 2000).

At the end of the 1970s, like much of the nation, Blissfield underwent an economic downturn, remarked several informants. Many stores in the historic downtown closed, leaving most buildings and storefronts vacant. Much of the manufacturing in town, the canning factory, and a major bank all closed during this time as well, leaving the town’s economy heavily reliant on agriculture. One interview participant indicated that “Blissfield went through a stretch where they had a lot of vacant store fronts…the antique business kind of took hold. Blissfield had a lot of antique stores for a long time.” This was during the latter part of the 1980s, and Blissfield became known as a regional
hub for antique shops, but by the late 1990s and early 2000s these businesses had also declined, noted by three interview participants and Blissfield’s Main Street application. Local service industries, restaurants, and retail turned over regularly in the downtown. As indicated by one interview participant,

“We did there for a while have a number of stores, they’d open and close. Another one would open and close, so we had a pretty good turnover rate, but the occupancy rate stayed fairly high. You get a continual high turnover rate like that, and that can kill a downtown. So we were looking for something to stabilize things.”

In 1992, seeing the need to step in during a period of downturn, the Blissfield village council authorized an ordinance to create a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to focus on economic development, indicated two interview participants and Blissfield’s Main Street application. The DDA in Blissfield intentionally encompassed nearly the entire business community, to ensure that few would feel slighted. The town council remained committed to continuing relationships with industries that were not considered part of the DDA, indicated one interview participant. The DDA focused on initiatives that emphasized physical infrastructure rather than economic and community development initiatives. One such program, a façade improvement grant, was instituted in 2000, as indicated in Blissfield’s Main Street application. Downtown businesses could apply to the DDA to receive funds to fix the façades of their buildings.
Current Demographic and Economic Snapshot of Blissfield

This current snapshot relies upon data collected in my archival data research, personal observations in the site, and key informant interviews (question 1 in the community level Main Street contact, citizens in the initial core group, and citizens involved along the way questions found in Appendix C). Spending time in the downtown, you get a sense of vibrancy and activity, even during the middle of the day on a weekday. There is much foot and vehicular traffic through the downtown area. When you step inside downtown restaurants, they are bustling with patrons enjoying lively conversation.

Today, the population of Blissfield is estimated to be 3,279 people with a median age of 42, as of July 1, 2013 (US Census, 2014). The largest employers of Blissfield residents are educational services, and healthcare and social assistance (28.5%); manufacturing (12.8%); retail trade (11.9%); arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services (11.2%); and professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services (7.7%). The median household income of residents was $45,133 (US Census, 2014).

The town revived historical railroad rides for entertainment purposes, and its line also carries general freight. There are several retail shops and restaurants located downtown and on the main road outside of town, and in general the town appears to be thriving. Manufacturing exists in a small scale Blissfield, and the agricultural sector continues to thrive, especially with the development of a new ethanol plant close to the village, as indicated by three informants.
Blissfield Community Organizing Process

In 2005, Sarah Smith, a resident and member of the Chamber of Commerce, was hosting her brother-in-law for a visit. She and her husband Brandon were proudly showing him around their town, and she indicated in her interview that her brother-in-law said, “what a shame, this is a dying town and it could be so cute”. Sarah had never considered Blissfield to be a dying town, in her interview she said that she “didn’t think of it that way. It’s [Blissfield] just how it was.” Once her brother-in-law left, though, she resolved to do something to help turn Blissfield around, as indicated in her interview. “Once he left, I got to thinking about it. We raised eight children in this school, love the school, love the community basically, and I need to do something.” She began taking pictures of things around town that needed repair. She also approached several friends from the community to begin to form an informal group of concerned citizens with a goal to make some changes in 2005. All of the Blissfield participants confirmed that she formed this group of concerned citizens, outside of any formal group or organization within the community.

The group that Sarah formed met at the Smiths’ house on Thursdays at 4 pm. It was open to anyone who wanted to join. Awareness of the group spread mostly by word of mouth through the Smiths’ friends, although anyone who wanted to join was welcomed. Sarah approached the village council, on which her husband Brandon served at the time, asking what the group could do to improve the conditions of downtown without needing to work through administrative approval. She wanted to retain the autonomy of this group of citizens, while ensuring she did not alienate the municipal government in the process. This group was interested in taking action to make changes in
the community’s built infrastructure and amenities. The village council informed them of
the town’s regulations, and Sarah’s group began to develop ideas for improving
infrastructure in the community.

Members of Sarah’s group brought others—local business owners, municipal
representatives, and residents with whom they were closely affiliated through their social
networks—to the meetings as well, helping to grow the group over time to approximately
20. While many people in this group knew each other, some were only acquaintances
while others had very close bonds. At this point, the group was comprised largely of
village business owners, although it also included council members, DDA members, and
residents. Interview participants divided the membership of this group into these
categories, and when asked to define further the backgrounds and social field affiliations
of the members, they struggled to find any other qualifiers than these main categories.
The group put out calls for volunteers to help clean up parks and areas of the town, work
on other projects such as infrastructure renovations and community clean ups across the
town, and develop related projects such as historical documentation of Blissfield with the
local retirement village. These events were quite successful. One interview participant
said that Sarah

“…had actually organized a boatload of people in my words. I bet you
there were a good 15, 20 people there for this volunteer day, and they were
not young kids…more of moms and dads kind of thing, meaning like
50ish. I’s probably in my early 40s when I got involved.”

Separately, in the early 2000s, Mark Bradshaw, the village manager, received
information about the Main Street Program, but at the time he and other village officials
did not feel that Blissfield was ready to take on the initiative. In his interview Mark said, “we [Blissfield] weren’t really sure what we would be biting off if we jumped into Michigan Main Street.” At the time, the Michigan Main Street Center had not yet developed the three different levels of program membership. In 2007, amid national economic uncertainty, the town council and DDA began hearing from local business owners that they were starting to have budgetary issues due to lack of customers. Mark and the council decided they needed to take a greater role in ensuring the economic vitality of Blissfield. Mark researched a list of initiatives to pursue that might help provide some economic stability in town. One of those options was the Main Street Program, which now included the Associate Level as an option.

Mark, along with the village president, Luke Skinner and Luke’s wife Tracy Sherman, attended an informal session in Marshall, Michigan to learn more about the Main Street Program. Mark recommended that Amy Thelen, who served as both the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce and DDA director, attend another informational meeting in Adrian. She and Martha Shulman, a business owner and a DDA board member, attended the information session. Martha appreciated the program’s approach because it allowed various efforts being done across the community to become unified. In her interview Martha said there were “different people, different committees, different non-profit organizations were not totally working against each other just not totally working together.” Luke, the town president, felt it “was an opportune time with Michigan Main Street [for Blissfield], being able to have that appeal of a small community downtown to have people see that as an asset, to have that be more of a destination I should say for
people but also trying to put some resources that appeal to the local residents as well.”

After receiving positive feedback from village council and the DDA, Mark began organizing a group to bring Main Streets to Blissfield. At the beginning most of the individuals involved were town governmental officials, village employees, council members, or DDA board members. In 2008, the town put in an application to be in the Associate Level, in order to begin to have a more formalized meeting structure to discuss the opportunity of bringing Main Street to Blissfield.

To further explore the Main Street approach and if it was appropriate to bring it to Blissfield, Mark organized meetings in 2008 at the office of the DDA. Knowing that Sarah had also organized a group of citizens, because he was involved in that group, he invited her to a Main Street meeting. Sarah was very enthusiastic about it. She wanted to bring food to meetings, but because the county health department would not let them do so, the groups agreed to meet at her house instead. Due to overlapping membership and seemingly overlapping interest in the community’s well being, the two groups were combined to unify their efforts across the community.

The groups, now formed into one, intentionally brought together village council members, DDA members, business owners, and residents. One interview participant indicated “there was a mixture of people that were businesses owners as well as residents of the community, so I think it was a pretty good cross-section in the community.” They intended to explore ideas that would address the economic and other identified issues that the community faced, while simultaneously gathering more information about Main Streets.
The group decided not to apply to the Select program at the end of the first year, 2009, and decided instead to continue on at the Associate Level. During its second year, the group began developing the specific structures associated with the Main Streets approach. At this juncture, two individuals not included in the ongoing process were concerned with the transparency of this effort and began to attack certain members of this committee. “They accused us of having secret meetings. And we said, how can you say that? You know we’ve announced it, and we all talk about it,” remarked one interview participant about the dissent of these community members. To help address their concerns, they were invited specifically to join the efforts of this group. This did however cause rifts in the creation of the Main Street program structure in Blissfield. Specifically, Sarah was particularly targeted, offended, and hurt due to the malicious nature of the public comments.

Despite these issues, the group decided to pursue applying to the Select Level of the Main Street program. Through the use of their social networks, this group intentionally sought to involve additional business owners and residents to serve on committees and support the Main Street program in Blissfield. Local creative and artistic individuals were enlisted to help put the application together to strengthen it and its presentation. “We wanted a mix of everybody. We wanted both the business owners and customers active in this so that everybody had a hand in it,” was the comment of one of the group members and interview participants.

At the end of the second year, 2010, approximately 20 people from the group developing the Main Street Program for Blissfield travelled to Lansing to the Michigan Main Street Center to present their application to the Select Level. Of the 19 communities
that applied that year, Blissfield was one of three chosen to be a Select Member. The town has been a Main Streets designated community for four years.

**Blissfield Community Organizing Structure**

The process of organizing is depicted in Figure 7: Blissfield Community Organizing Structure. This is meant to be a representation of the process and not a full network diagram of the structure, due to incomplete information on the social networks of the community organizing structure. This section helps to summarize the organizing process in Blissfield. The left side of the figure details the two separate organizing
processes occurring in Blissfield, the first and top one initiated by Sarah in 2005, and the second and bottom one initiated by Mark and village officials in 2007. The circles (nodes) represent individuals in the processes, and the lines indicate social ties between the individuals. While the ties may have existed previously, these ties are representative of the connection between nodes associated with these specific processes. To determine the strength of the ties, qualifiers of the ties from interview transcripts such as friends and family were used to indicate stronger ties to another node. Weak ties were indicated by participants as those connections between acquaintances, colleagues, or newly established connections. The arrows on the ties indicate directionality of the ties. For example, a solid line that originates at a node with an arrow to another indicates that an individual sought the participation of a close friend or family member. The color of the nodes indicates the social fields they represent, though individuals typically represented more than one social field. The social fields were determined through the responses of interview participants.

Sarah actively utilized her social networks and strong ties in the community to initiate the organizing efforts, specifically beginning with her close ties to friends and family. Her strong and weak ties to the village council allowed her to seek out information. Sarah created a group of individuals able to freely explore ideas across multiple social fields within the community (individuals were affiliated with more than one social field), and Sarah’s group was formed and expanded through the use of her own and group members’ strong and weak ties. They did move to the implementation phase for some of their ideas, such as the infrastructure work and clean up projects, before the
two separate organizing processes combined, which is why the distinction between those phases is permeable and not represented by a solid line.

Mark, who had strong ties to the other village officials, championed the village organizing process. This effort was much smaller, more targeted, and affiliated with official village structures and people in formal positions, with few social fields represented. The council and DDA members associated with these efforts were able to safely discuss the options Mark presented to them before they moved forward with the organizing process.

There are lines linking Sarah’s and Mark’s processes, as these groups had overlapping memberships. Mark was involved in Sarah’s process, though he was not acting in any official capacity on behalf of the town.

Once the community organizing processes coalesced, the combined group continued to implement several ideas, including the Main Street program. A small core group representing several social fields across the community worked on the Main Street application. This group expanded through the use of weak ties and creation of ties as they began to identify and understand the requirements of the Main Street approach. This group eventually expanded to include more diverse social fields across the community, partly as a response to the negative response from some citizens, and feedback from individuals across different social fields were regularly sought before moving forward in the implementation phase.

The innovations in this case study were two-fold. The community worked through a process of innovation, producing several creative ideas that were then utilized in the community (by definition, innovations) beyond adopting the Main Street Program.
Additionally, the process(es) they worked through proved to be a new way of organizing for them, which itself was an innovation. While Mark’s process was more limited in representation from social fields, Sarah’s was representative of social fields across the community. Additionally, when they coalesced, they intentionally sought out additional individuals to represent more social fields across the community. This was a form of institutional innovation, as it provided a new structure for individuals to connect across the community (Van De Ven & Hargrave, 2004; Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2006). It could also be considered a form of social entrepreneurship, as the explicit goal of the organizing was for improving the social conditions of the community (Dees, 2001). Additionally, because the expressed purpose was to impact the well-being of the entire community, and because there was a wide representation of social fields across the community, this institutional innovation occurred within a community field (Wilkinson, 1999).

**Portland Case Study**

This section describes the Portland Case Study. Portland was chosen as a site because it was one of the original applicants to the Michigan Main Street Program (in the most recent implementation at the state level). Additionally, the Portland application to the Main Street Program indicated it was a resident-driven initiative, and not one that was solely the implementation of a municipal government. The case study provides a historical narrative of Portland, a current snapshot of the community, a description of the organizing process in the city, and a summary of the process including the social networks of the process.
Portland Historical Narrative

This historical narrative relies upon data collected in my archival data research as well as my key informant interviews in Portland (question 1 in the community level Main Street contact, citizens in the initial core group, and citizens involved along the way questions found in Appendix C). The archival data includes the texts referenced here as well as the Portland Main Street applications. The historical downtown of the city of Portland is located at the confluence of two rivers, the Looking Glass and the Grand River, both with regional significance. In Figure 7, Portland is designated by the red pin.

Figure 8: Map of Portland, Michigan
Source: Source: Google Maps (retrieved September 13, 2014 from http://maps.google.com)
Portland also is located on Interstate 96, a major highway that cuts across the lower peninsula of Michigan. It is located between three larger urban areas, Grand Rapids (44 miles away; population 192,294), Lansing (27 miles; population 113,972), and Ionia (18 miles; population 11,424) (distance was determined by Google Maps (2014) and population size was determined by the US Census (2014)).

The Portland area has a long history of settlement by the Pottawatomi and Chippewa Native American tribes, due to its important river location (Neese, 2005). The first white American to settle in the area was Elisha Newman, who established a homestead in 1833 (Neese, 2005). Portland was formally established as a village through the State of Michigan in 1869 (Neese, 2005).

The early industries of Portland included flour mills, fanning mills, manufacturing (furniture, wagons, carriages, agricultural implements, stage coaches), and a woolen mill for producing textiles (Neese, 2005). These factories and mills were water-powered, due to the town’s location on the rivers. In the late 1860s, three railroad lines were established through Portland, which helped the town’s economic connections to the rest of the state and beyond. In the early 1870s, Portland was booming, with its population increasing from 1,068 in 1870 to 1,500 just two years later. From the 1870s until the early 1930s, Portland’s economy continued to flourish, adding industries such as the production of washing machines and automobile parts (Neese, 2005).

The downtown area along Kent Street became established as a major retail and service hub. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the town established an Opera House, as well as several upscale hotels such as the Hotel Divine, which became famous in Michigan, remarked four interview participants. The downtown continued to flourish
into the 1960s with several popular service businesses such as pharmacies and soda fountains. However, as the commercial use of railroads declined, so did the industry in town. Although shipping shifted to the use of interstates, Interstate 96 bypassed Portland’s downtown. Business became oriented to the interstate access points, and downtown retail and service businesses could not easily compete, noted by one interview participant. In the early 1980s and 1990s, as in Blissfield, the antiques industry had a strong presence in Portland, but this prosperity was short-lived. By the early 2000s, downtown Portland had many derelict buildings and vacant storefronts, as indicated by Portland’s Main Street applications. Many buildings were torn down. Residents of Portland felt a general sense of hopelessness and resignation, evidenced by their lack of community action and activity, as mentioned by three interview participants.

**Current Demographic and Economic Snapshot of Portland**

This current snapshot relies upon data collected in my personal observations in the site and key informant interviews (question 1 in the community level Main Street contact, citizens in the initial core group, and citizens involved along the way questions found in Appendix C). The business culture in the downtown area of Portland continues to struggle. While there is economic activity in Portland, and parts of the downtown are showing signs of improvement, there are several vacant storefronts and many of the service industry businesses on the main street seem to be in disrepair. Foot traffic is sparse in the downtown, likely due to the lack of businesses on the main streets, except for during specific events.
The population, as of July 1, 2013, was estimated to be 3,914 with a median age of 35.6 (US Census, 2014). The largest employers of residents are educational services, and health care and social assistance (18.9%); retail trade (13.7%); arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services (12.7%), manufacturing (9.7%), and public administration (9.7%) with a median household income of $44,717 (US Census, 2014). There are still several manufacturing facilities and a grain mill in and near town.

**Portland Community Organizing Process**

In the early 2000s, the late Sheryl Clawson became mayor of Portland. She and the city council hired an interim city manager, the late Jeremy Bronson, in 2002. Jeremy, who had previously owned a consulting business, had a history of serving in other cities in various municipal roles, including manager, and had several relationships with state officials through his many years of experience working with state agencies.

Interview participants described Jeremy as an incredibly enthusiastic man. In his role as interim manager, he saw incredible potential in the city of Portland. He specifically wanted to re-energize the downtown area. Jeremy formed the Business Owners and Property Owners Committee (BOPOC), in partnership with downtown business owners, to begin to explore ideas to reinvigorate the economic landscape of the downtown area of Portland. This group was quite large involving between 30 – 40 individuals. One interview participant noted that:

“He [Jeremy] was in touch with all of them, primarily the business owners, but he also knew many of the property owners that, I think
probably a few of the businesses were leased from somebody else, primarily the business owners were the property owners. But he didn’t want to exclude people who just owned property, he wanted to bring in all the stakeholders.”

At this same time, Michigan was exploring the idea of bringing a Main Street program back to the state. Jeremy heard about the development of this new program through an official at the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), which directed the work of the Main Street initiative. Jeremy suggested to the council and Sheryl in 2002 that Portland should try to become a Main Streets Program, and they agreed, as indicated by all of the interview participants.

Jeremy arranged to have the MEDC official come to Portland to discuss with them the possibility of bringing Main Street to Portland. Jeremy asked the BOPOC to attend a meeting with the MEDC official to learn more about the Main Street program. Between 50 and 60 interested business people and property owners attended the informational meeting with the MEDC official in 2002. Later this individual indicated to city officials that although he had not initially thought that Portland had what it took to be part of Main Street, the support at that initial informational meeting changed his perspective.

The BOPOC members decided at that meeting that it would be a good idea to apply to the Main Streets Program. Jeremy and Sheryl both became driving forces in organizing to apply to Main Street, but Jeremy led many of the meetings. The BOPOC, along with city officials, decided that Portland’s Downtown Development Authority would administer the Main Street Program, a decision that led to animosity in the town.
This was because some individuals within the BOPOC did not want the municipal government to have control over the Main Street Program.

As required by the National Main Street Center, the town had to designate a district specifically recognized as the historic downtown and the Main Street district. Their selection of a small downtown district caused business owners located elsewhere to feel that the businesses downtown were getting special treatment. Most of the business owners located close to the interstate lost interest in the efforts to revitalize downtown, except for a car dealership owner who remained dedicated and repeatedly tried to rally support for the Main Streets program. Several other Portland organizations, including the Chamber of Commerce and the newly established Arts Council, also were dedicated to community and economic development. The Chamber of Commerce in particular was comprised of residents with long family histories in town. The Main Street Program’s focus on a small number of businesses downtown created animosity with the Chamber of Commerce, which increasingly saw Main Streets as competition rather than an asset for the entire community. One interview participant remarked

“A number of people saw it not only as a competition with the chamber of commerce, but that the downtown was being given privileges and benefits that the rest of the of the business owners in town were not privilege to. So it became an us against them mentality in some respects.”

Support outside the BOPOC for Main Streets was weak because of this division. The fact that Jeremy Bronson did not have longstanding, strong connections with the town was also a factor, indicated by residents. “He made some probably inappropriate, certainly ill-advised remarks to people that were in service businesses in the downtown,
and that created some more problems,” said one interview participant. Jeremy suggested that he believed that Portland’s downtown should be a retail-only district, and that service businesses should not be located there. This remark offended downtown service business owners, further reducing the number of people willing to work on the Main Street application and jeopardized support for the Main Streets Program.

At this time, a group of approximately 10 individuals comprised of city officials and members from the BOPOC remained dedicated to bringing the Main Street program to Portland. This small group represented people relatively new to Portland, and these individuals were all largely in formal leadership positions in the community. This created additional animosity in town, as many longtime residents saw this as an effort by outsiders to change Portland. This group did make efforts to connect with other business owners and residents to serve as committee members through their social networks, but these additional individuals were small in number. Portland submitted the paperwork to the Michigan Main Street Center, presented its application, and was accepted into the program in 2003 as one of the first Main Street designated communities in Michigan. The town remains active as a Master Level community to this day.

**Portland Community Organizing Structure**

Portland’s organizing process is detailed in Figure 9. As with Blissfield, this is meant only to be a representation and not a formal mapping of the social networks involved in the process, due to the incomplete nature of data collected. This helps to summarize the organizing process in this case.
The circles (nodes) represent individuals in the processes, and the lines indicate social ties between the individuals. While the ties may have existed previously, these ties are representative of the connection between nodes associated with these specific processes. To determine the strength of the ties, qualifiers from interview transcripts such as friends and family were used to indicate stronger ties to another node. Weak ties were indicated by participants as those connections between acquaintances, colleagues, or newly established connections. The arrows on the ties indicate directionality of the ties. For example, a solid line that originates at a node with an arrow to another indicates that an individual sought the participation of a close friend or family member. The color of the nodes indicates the social fields they represent, though individuals typically represented more than one social field. The social fields were determined through interview participants.
The process of organizing began with Jeremy establishing a large number of weak ties to the local community of business and property owners known as the BOPOC. This group was limited in the amount of social fields represented. While the ties from Jeremy to the BOPOC members were weak, there were several members of the BOPOC that were closely tied to each other. He then gathered this group, which expanded to include 50-60 people, to receive information from the state of Michigan about the Main Street program and approach. While the BOPOC was deliberating this approach, some business owners affiliated with the group stopped participating, leaving a smaller group of people who remained interested in pursuing this option. During the movement from the Idea Formation phase to the Implementation phase, additional individuals became offended and left the effort. Those remaining with the effort were individuals relatively new to Portland, but strongly committed to pursue the final application to the Main Street program. This small group did reach out to gain support from others in the business community with very limited success, and consequently this group was very limited in its representation of social fields.

The innovation in this case was rather limited. There was a real lack of creative ideas; adopting the Main Street Program was the main focus, not the implementation of several options that included the Main Street Program. While initially, there seemed to be some institutional innovation by bringing together the business and property owners to organize in a new way, due to the gaffes in the organizing process, the community ended up relying on a limited few individuals, mostly connected to existing municipal government structures. The organizing effort could be seen as a form of social entrepreneurship, as the end goal was explicitly social in nature (Dees, 2001). However,
due to the limited nature and focus of the organizing efforts on the business community, this organizing was more likely associated with a social field rather than a true community field (Wilkinson, 1999).

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter presented two case studies from the state of Michigan, detailing the community organizing processes in Blissfield and Portland that made application to the Michigan Main Street Program. The implementation of the Main Street Program in Michigan has undergone significant change, mostly in response to feedback from communities across the state, to include a tiered approach.

The Blissfield case study, a small rural village which hit an economic peak in the late 1800s and early 1900s with steady economic decline since the mid-1900s, documented two separate organizing processes that eventually coalesced into once combined effort. One organizing process originated from informal, community resident efforts, while the other originated largely from municipal government initiatives. Overall, the process included multiple social fields, though the efforts did emphasize improvements to the downtown area with a large focus on the business sector.

On the other hand, in the case of Portland, a small rural city whose economic peak was in the early 1900s with a steady economic decline since the mid-1900s, the organizing process was a singular effort that originated in municipal government. This process was primarily limited to individuals representative of the business sector and social field, and heavily emphasized improvement in the business sector in the downtown area. This organizing process was met with several struggles throughout, and relied
heavily on a limited amount of individuals from a narrow group of social fields across the community.
Chapter 5

Pennsylvania Case Studies
In this chapter, case studies of two communities in Pennsylvania, Clearfield and Titusville, are described. Similar to the previous chapter about the sites in Michigan, the case study narratives provide an overview of the processes in these communities. Greater detail regarding goals, processes, and feelings of participants is found in the analysis presented in Chapter 6.

To create these case study narratives, I utilized the data collected in the key informant interviews. I compiled information across several key informants, using the data collected from the questions that asked about how the community organized to become part of the Main Street program (question 4 in the community level main streets contact interview questions; question 3 in the initial core group questions; and question 2 and in the citizens involved along the way questions; these interview questions can be found in Appendix C). Additionally, I compiled data from the key informant interviews to develop the social networks associated with these community organizing processes over time (question 4 in the community level main streets contact interview questions; questions 4 and 5 in the initial core group questions and the citizens involved along the way questions in Appendix C).

As with the Michigan case studies, informants found it difficult to recall all people involved in the process, and at what point in time they were involved in the process. However, informants were able to identify many of the core individuals to the efforts as well as what social fields across the community were represented. Due to the incomplete nature of the data, I provide a representation of the structure of social network connections throughout the process and the social fields represented rather than a formal social network analysis.
I begin by providing a brief historical context for the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, followed by a description of Pennsylvania’s work with the Main Street Program. Each case study includes a historical context of the site, a snapshot of current economic and demographic conditions, a description of the community organizing process, and a summary of the structure of the organizing process.

**Pennsylvania: A Historical Context**

Pennsylvania has a rich history, deeply rooted in the founding of the United States. This historical snapshot draws from the Pennsylvania Manual published by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (2013). Prior to white colonization, several Native American tribes settled the area that is now Pennsylvania, including the Lenape (or Delawares), the Susquehannocks, the Shawnees, and the Iroquois Confederacy.

The English colony that eventually became Pennsylvania was granted to William Penn in the Charter of Pennsylvania on March 4, 1681, in order to settle debts owed to Penn by King Charles II. Penn, a member of the Society of Friends (more popularly known as Quakers), was eager to leave England due to religious persecution. Penn’s personal experience shaped the governance of the colony. While King Charles II granted the land that comprises Pennsylvania, Penn and his family chose to purchase their land claims from the Native American tribes gradually. In the early 1700s, however, attempts to create peaceful living between tribes and colonists failed, pushing the Native Americans westward and, by the end of the century, nearly entirely out of Pennsylvania.

Although English Quaker immigrants dominated the demographic and cultural landscape of early Pennsylvania, other immigrants from Europe settled in Pennsylvania
as well. Large populations of Germans settled in the regions around Northampton, Berks, Lancaster, and Lehigh Counties. By the time of the Revolution, Germans comprised a third of the population of Pennsylvania. Scottish and Irish immigrants created settlements in the interior and western parts of Pennsylvania. Dutch, French, Swedes, and others also helped to shape the ethnic and cultural landscape of present-day Pennsylvania. Slavery brought over 4,000 Africans to the colony by 1730. By 1790 the black population grew to 10,000, of whom 6,500 received their freedom through the Pennsylvania Gradual Abolition Act of 1780.

By the time the American Revolution began in 1775, Pennsylvania had grown to be the third largest English colony, and Philadelphia was the second largest English-speaking city in the world (second only to London). The state underwent tremendous political turmoil to create its first state constitution, ratified on September 28, 1776. The constitution of the commonwealth has been rewritten and revised several times since this original document was created. The borders of present-day Pennsylvania were not finalized until 1809, due to land disputes with Native Americans and with other states.

Textile manufacturing, leather making, forestry, shipbuilding, publishing, and tobacco dominated the early economy of Pennsylvania in the 1800s. In the mid-1800s the commonwealth’s lumber industry led the nation, although it declined at the turn of the twentieth century. Agriculture also played a major role in the state’s early economy, and still remains an important industry.

Iron ore and anthracite coal extraction fueled economic growth in the early 1800s. These industries, dominated by several powerful individuals and companies that still remain influential in Pennsylvania today, enabled the expansion and growth of the
railroad and shipping industries in the commonwealth and across the nation. The
discovery of oil near Titusville in 1859 substantially contributed to the commonwealth’s
economic growth in the second half of the nineteenth century. The most dominant
industry in Pennsylvania, however, has been the production of steel and steel products.
Although this industry has waxed and waned since the early 1800s, according to demand
and global competition, it has nevertheless been the state’s largest industry.

Beginning prior to World War II, there were great labor disputes in Pennsylvania
manufacturing industries throughout the mid-1900s, which impacted the economic
landscape of the state and the nation through the redefining of the relationship between
companies and their labor force. The steady decline of the railroad, steel, and coal
industries during the later part of the 1900s put a great strain on the economy of the state.
Recent development of natural gas extraction has created a renewed focus on energy
production.

Current Economic and Demographic Snapshot of Pennsylvania

As of July 1, 2013, Pennsylvania’s population was estimated to be 12,773,801,
with a median age of 40.1 (US Census, 2014). As of the 2010 census, the racial
breakdown of Pennsylvania is 79.5% White, 10.4% African American, 5.7% Hispanic,
2.7% Asian, and 1.7% all other categories (US Census, 2014). To provide comparison,
as of July 1, 2013, the national median age is 38.5, and the country’s racial make up is
predominantly white (63.7%), followed in order of proportion by Hispanic (16.3%),
African American, non-Hispanic (12.2%), Asian, non-Hispanic (4.7%), and all other
races (3.1%) (US Census (2014). The largest employers by industry as of July 2014 are
health care and social assistance (16.2%), government (12.4%), retail trade (10.9%),
manufacturing (9.6%), and accommodation and food services (7.7%) (Pennsylvania
Department of Labor and Industry, 2014). Pennsylvania has the sixth largest economy in
the nation, and the largest contributors to the state’s gross domestic product by industry
as of 2013 are finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing (19.0%); professional and
business services (13.4%); manufacturing (12.0%); educational services, health care,
social assistance (11.54%); and government (10.5%) (Statista, 2014).

Pennsylvania Structure for Main Street Program

The data provided for this section are from my archival information research as
well as from key informant interviews (questions 1 and 4 from the state level Main Street
contact interview questions and question 2 from the community level Main Street contact
interview questions found in Appendix C). The sources of the archival data are those
cited within the text. In 1980, Pennsylvania was one of the first states to adopt the Main
Street program when it expanded beyond the Midwest. In Pennsylvania, the program is
instituted through the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED).
This department provides the funding for the program in the local municipality. The type
of funding available to municipalities has changed considerably over the program’s
tenure in Pennsylvania. At its inception, it was a three year program, where the state
provided $20,000 to the municipality in the first year (typically to pay for the salary of
the community’s Main Street manager), $10,000 the second year, and $5,000 the third
year. By the fourth year, the local program needed to be self-funded. This structure
changed to a five-year scheme in the early 1990s.
During the 1990s, the state saw a large increase in the number of communities participating in the Main Street program; much of the focus of these community programs was on façade and infrastructure improvements. As the Main Street program continued to evolve, in 2008, the DCED established a program called New Communities. Main Street was combined with several other economic and community development initiatives, allowing applications to these programs to be streamlined under one funding structure and application. At this time, a community could receive a five-year grant to become a Main Street community, and the state would provide funding over this five-year period to the organization instituting the Main Street Program in the community. The local community was required to match these funds dollar for dollar. This funding could be used for operations (including the salary of the Main Street manager) as well as for community programs, such as façade improvements. This structure limited the number of communities who were approved to be Main Street communities, depending on the allocation for the New Communities program each year in the state’s budget. At the end of the five-year grant, the community was no longer considered to be a Main Street Program community unless it resubmitted another application.

In 2011, the Corbett administration developed the Keystone Communities program. Like the New Communities program, it combined several programs under one funding structure. This is the current program for establishing the Main Street Program in communities across the state. Communities apply to be part of the Keystone Main Street Program. Like the New Communities program they receive this distinction for five years. The state no longer provides operational funding to communities who are successful in their application to the Keystone Main Street program. Communities are, however, given
priority access to state grant programs for initiatives in their community. The communities must apply for these funds. Because of the funding structure, limitations are no longer set on the number of communities that are allowed into the Keystone Main Street program. Applicants need to meet the requirements set by the state and national Main Street Program.

Once a community is designated a Main Street community, it is also provided free technical and educational assistance. These services are not provided through the DCED. The DCED instead contracts with the Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC), a nonprofit organization, to provide local assistance with application creation and local program support. This organization also oversees the application process to the DCED, certifying communities who apply for Main Street Community status. Main Street managers founded the PDC in 1987 to provide greater support than the DCED offered at the time. It has since evolved to be the regulatory body for the Main Street organization in Pennsylvania. The PDC provides support to all local Main Street managers and programs and hosts conferences and trainings. Although the PDC has a greater mission than just supporting the Main Street Program, supporting Main Street remains a core area of focus for the organization. Of the 47 states that have Main Street Programs, only eight are affiliated with or have contracted with nonprofit organizations like the PDC.

Communities that do not elect to apply to the Keystone Main Street program may apply directly to the PDC to be designated a Main Street community. This distinction does not permit them any priority access to funding and requires that they pay for certain technical services that Keystone Main Street communities receive free. Pennsylvania communities may therefore be classified into three categories: New Communities Main
Street Communities (for those that have not reached their five-year requirement to reapply), Keystone Community Main Street Communities, and Main Street Communities.

Creating a Main Street program at the local level requires an organization that will institute the program. Although a municipal government applies to be considered a Main Street program, a separate authority associated with the municipal government or an independent nonprofit organization administers the program. Grants are applied for on behalf of the municipal government, but again, the authority or nonprofit administers the funding. Municipal governments may support the funding of the authority or nonprofit organization, but there is no requirement to do so.

There are two main options for providing funding for the salary of the Main Street manager and for program initiatives. The first is through the use of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). BIDs are geographic zones that typically encompass the downtown of a community. Businesses and other organizations in the BID pay a fee to the administering authority or nonprofit organization. If a BID is already in place, it can encompass a Main Street district, or a BID may be created when a Main Street district is designated. The second typical option is to create a nonprofit organization and use fundraising as a fiscal strategy. This requires incorporation at the state and federal levels, as well as applying for 501c3 status through the IRS.

**Clearfield Case Study**

This section describes the Clearfield case study. Clearfield was chosen as a site due to it being a recent applicant to the Main Street program in Pennsylvania. The application of Clearfield indicated that the community organizing process was resident-
driven, not instituted from the municipal government. This section includes a brief history of the city of Clearfield, a current snapshot of the city, a description of the community’s organizing process, and a summary of the process including the social networks within the process.

Clearfield Historical Narrative

This historical narrative relies upon data collected in archival data research as well as key informant interviews in Clearfield (question 1 in the community level Main Street contact, citizens in the initial core group, and citizens involved along the way questions found in Appendix C). The archival data includes those materials cited within the next section. Clearfield, the county seat of Clearfield County, is located in western Pennsylvania at the intersection of three major transportation routes, Interstate 80, US-322, and US-219. It is close to other urban centers including DuBois (20 miles; population 7,693), State College (41 miles; population 41,757), and Altoona (53 miles; population 45,796) (distance was determined by Google Maps (2014) and population size was determined by the US Census (2014)). Clearfield’s location is displayed in Figure 10.
Clearfield was founded in 1804 by Roland Curtin, John Fleming, and James Smith, commissioners appointed by Governor McKean. Clearfield was to be the seat of the newly formed county with the same name. It was located on land donated by Abraham Whitmer, and had about 20 inhabitants as of 1810. At first the community was considered part of the township of Chincleclamoushe. This township was later divided into multiple townships, including Lawrence Township, which continued to have jurisdiction over Clearfield until 1840, when Clearfield was officially named a borough. At this time, the town had grown to about 300 residents (Aldrich, 1887).

Industry in Clearfield County in the 1840s was dominated by coal and lumber (Aldrich, 1887; Hughes, 2006). Agriculture was less of an industry and more of an individual necessity in the early 1800s, but it progressively grew more important.
(Hughes, 2006). From 1840 to 1890, lumber grew to be an important aspect of the economy in Clearfield County, with a heavy emphasis on harvesting white pine, although it waned by the end of the century (Hughes, 2006). In 1900 farming had become the largest industry in the county, with large numbers of family farms. Tanneries were very prominent in Clearfield and Clearfield County until the early 1900s (Hughes, 2006). Agriculture dominated the economic landscape until 1945 (Hughes, 2006).

The establishment of the railroad in the 1860s and 1870s enabled the growth of the lumber and coal industries (Hughes, 2006). By 1872, Clearfield County was second only to Pittsburgh in bituminous coal production (Hughes, 2006). A large wave of Irish immigrants seeking work in both railroad construction and coal mining settled in Clearfield County between the 1860s and 1880s (Hughes, 2006). Additionally, due to the state’s economic success at the turn of the twentieth century, a second large wave of immigrants arrived in Clearfield County, primarily Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, and Poles (Hughes, 2006).

Due to the demand for coal in the First World War, Clearfield’s coal industry was booming into the 1920s (Hughes, 2006). The industry waned in the 1930s due to the Depression, until demand once again increased in the 1940s because of World War II (Hughes, 2006). Open pit mining allowed for greater growth in the coal industry in the 1950s, due to a less capital-intensive process. In the 1970s and 1980s the industry steeply declined; however, and today the industry is but a fraction of what it once was with significantly less jobs for local residents (Hughes, 2006).

Until the late 1960s and early 1970s, Clearfield County was considered the number one brick producer in the world (Hughes, 2006). However, the refractory
industry steeply declined due to the lack of demand from the failing steel industry, the invention of PVC piping (replacing clay piping), and the decline of steam train engines (bricks were used to line boilers of steam locomotives) (Hughes, 2006). This industry has not regained traction in the county since that time.

Due to its heavy dependence on natural resource industries, the city of Clearfield suffered severely during the Depression, similar to the rest of the county and region, indicated one interview participant. During the war efforts of the 1940s, manufacturing in the city rebounded, and the economy flourished until the 1980s, due to the coal rebirth in the 1970s and 1980s, indicated one interview participant. However, in the 1990s the coal and brick industries in the city and county shut down, and most of the natural resource industry left at that time. Manufacturing also declined, with the closing of several factories that were relocated to areas with a cheaper labor force. The retail and service industry declined in the downtown, leaving the area in disrepair and with several vacant storefronts. The city has been in a steady state of decline since the early 1990s, with a large outmigration of local individuals seeking employment in other areas. One interview participant remarked “The coal industry is pretty well gone. The brick industry is pretty well gone. Anything that is natural resource based is pretty well gone.” This decline in industry created a pessimistic attitude among the residents, as witnessed by study informants.

**Current Demographic and Economic Snapshot of Clearfield**

This current snapshot relies upon data collected in my archival data research and personal observations in the site, and key informant interviews (question 1 in the
community level Main Street contact, citizens in the initial core group, and citizens involved along the way questions found in Appendix C). Today, there is evidence in Clearfield of road and sidewalk renovation, active façade refurbishment, new construction of buildings, and occupied storefronts. However, many of these storefronts are filled either with legal practices or businesses related to the courthouse. This has increased the price of rents for space in the downtown, while also decreasing availability for retail shops and restaurants that might increase foot traffic in this area throughout the day. As you step out of the city center into some of the less attended areas, there is clearly opportunity for further redevelopment of buildings and infrastructure.

The population of the borough of Clearfield as of July 1, 2013 was 6,113, with a median age of 42.8 (US Census, 2014). The largest employers of Clearfield residents are educational services, and health care and social assistance (26.4%); retail trade (17.0%); arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services (10.7%); manufacturing (8.6%); and finance, insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing (5.7%). The median income is $30,842 (US Census, 2014). Clearfield County has been surveyed for natural gas development, but its deposits are not as thick as other counties, indicated one interview participant. This prospecting has not yet brought development to the county.

**Clearfield Community Organizing Process**

In 2006, the natural gas industry began showing interest in the Clearfield area. Donovan Parker, a local business owner with strong and weak ties across the community and the state of Pennsylvania through his previous involvement in community organizing initiatives, business dealings, and political activities, knew the development of natural gas
had the potential to shape the future of life in Clearfield. He discussed the importance of taking a proactive approach to natural gas development with several other local business owners and leaders with whom he had close ties. After several decades of decline, Clearfield was in a position to chart a future of economic expansion. These individuals were afraid that without immediate action, outside individuals from the natural gas companies would have a considerable impact on the life of residents in the town in the very near future.

Informally, and outside of municipal government, this group, made up of some of the wealthiest and most powerful local individuals, began discussing its options. “Borough Council was not very progressive. So we were dealing with a government that was very happy with the way things were, and they really didn’t want to do anything supportive” remarked one interview participant. The group members decided that if they were to be successful in charting a path for Clearfield’s future, they would need greater participation from the Clearfield community as a whole. To help facilitate this process, Donovan contacted Penn State DuBois, a commonwealth campus of The Pennsylvania State University, for resources. He was referred to Penn State Extension, which connected him to Chris Jones, an individual who had years of experience working in and around Clearfield County. Chris and Donovan discussed the goals of the small group, and they collectively decided to arrange for Chris to lead the group in a community visioning process. This process is a community development practice that involves a planned facilitation experience for developing a community’s approach for meeting their current needs, while envisioning a new future direction (Okubo, 2009).
To move this process along, Chris worked with the small group facilitated by Donovan to identify individuals who could be part of this visioning process. They began by identifying stakeholder groups, and within these stakeholder groups specific individuals they felt would provide them greater access to support and assets within the organizations and businesses they represented. They identified six key areas of interest: education, health care, infrastructure, culture/recreation, civic participation (specifically in municipal and community-based organizations), and community (referring to the culture and the connectedness among residents). The small group was very selective of who was invited to this process, focusing specifically on business owners, organization directors, and other senior-level individuals who represented organizations and businesses across the community. One interview participant said,

“We had to bring people in who had access to talent within their organization. And you’ve got to bring in the naysayers, because if you’ve got a group that’s always on the sideline throwing rocks at you, and they don’t want you to move ahead, they can be very counterproductive. So we tried to be as inclusive as we could.”

Over the course of three three-hour meetings in 2007, Chris facilitated the visioning process with a group of approximately 50 stakeholders. These individuals began developing and implementing several ideas to address the issues facing Clearfield within the previously mentioned areas of interest, while providing a vision of how they hoped to shape the future. One of these options was to apply to become a Main Street community by applying to the New Communities program through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. The reason for doing so was to
gain access to the external resources that participation in the program enabled. A visioning process subgroup helped to identify individuals from the larger group of stakeholders as well as the broader community to move this application effort forward. The main driver from this subgroup was Jennifer Brown, then-mayor of Clearfield.

After the visioning process was completed, Jennifer continued the initiative to bring the Main Street program to Clearfield. In July 2007, she helped to convene a Main Street planning group, bringing in individuals from the Pennsylvania Downtown Center to share information about the New Communities program and Main Street. This planning group met twice monthly over the course of the year. In the beginning, this group represented primarily individuals with clout in the community, including bank representatives, small business owners, the mayor, the borough manager, and presidents of local organizations, although it also included some nonaffiliated, dedicated residents. “It was a mix of residents, small business owners, and we had a good mix. We had some people that gave us some clout” mentioned one interview participant. Many were relatively young. Some were good friends while others were not previously connected to each other. The group intentionally did not include the members of the borough council, because the council was seen as a hindrance to progress and change in the community due to their reluctance to initiate and entertain legislation and action aimed at change in the community. Consequently, the mayor was not reelected, due to tensions caused by this process because she opposed the council.

During its meetings, the Main Street planning group decided to pursue the creation of a 501c3 nonprofit organization, the Clearfield Revitalization Corporation, to house the Clearfield Main Street program. A young business owner, Shelby Freeman,
was elected as president of the organization, and was a main driver in the effort to bring the Main Street program to Clearfield. Shelby intentionally created a safe space to explore ideas and opportunities associated with the nonprofit creation as well as the Main Street program. She served as a liaison between multiple organizations, while shielding the Main Street planning group from resistance in the community. She intentionally informed the municipal government about their progress, receiving ideas and input from those that were more resistant to this effort, while also ensuring that they did not take control of or limit the process.

Over the course of a year, the Main Street planning group developed this organizational structure while also developing its New Communities Main Street application. Doing so put great pressure on this small group dedicated to the writing and filing of appropriate paperwork. The Main Street planning group sought the advice and support of the group led by Donovan who convened the visioning process. Additionally, using their personal networks, this group began to identify new individuals, both close friends and acquaintances, to serve on the board of the Clearfield Revitalization Corporation, intentionally seeking out younger individuals who represented a diverse array of individuals across the community.

“We definitely had a very much hometown rally, small, community, young, up and coming families who wanted this to happen for their kids, and for raising their kids here, and that was kind of like one of our brandings of Clearfield as the All American small town,” said one of the interview participants.
This is important because this board would institute and maintain the Main Street program in Clearfield.

In 2008, the Clearfield Revitalization Corporation submitted its application to the New Communities Main Street Program on behalf of and with support from the borough government. In August, Clearfield was accepted into the program as the last community in the New Communities program. The city is now applying to continue to be a Main Street community through the Keystone Communities initiative.

**Clearfield Community Organizing Structure**

Figure 11 displays the Clearfield organizing structure. This is meant only to be a representation of the process and not an actual display of the full social networks involved, due to incomplete data. This section is also meant to serve as a summary of the organizing process for Clearfield. The circles (nodes) represent individuals in the
processes, and the lines indicate social ties between the individuals. While the ties may have existed previously, these ties are representative of the connection between nodes associated with these specific processes. To determine the strength of the ties, qualifiers of the ties from interview transcripts such as friends and family were used to indicate stronger ties to another node. Weak ties were indicated by participants as those connections between acquaintances, colleagues, or newly established connections. The arrows on the ties indicate directionality of the ties. For example, a solid line that originates at a node with an arrow to another indicates that an individual sought the participation of a close friend or family member. The dashed lines represent weaker ties, those that are acquaintances or new connections. The color of the nodes indicates the social fields they represent, though individuals typically represented more than one social field. The social fields were determined through interview participants.

This process began with the external influence of the natural gas industry prospecting in Clearfield. Due to this impetus, Donovan connected with other local business people and organization leaders, with much power and many assets. These were people he knew through strong ties and through previous experience with them on other initiatives. However, this group was limited in representation from across the community. These individuals shared some weak and some strong ties. They connected to Chris, an external resource through Penn State Extension. This individual helped them identify additional stakeholders according to their needs, though largely lacking in representation from residents who were not active in business or were not positional leaders within their organizations. These additional stakeholders shared some strong ties, although most were weakly tied to the initial group, as well as to the expanded group.
From the visioning experience, a small group formed to develop the Clearfield Revitalization Corporation and the application to the New Communities Main Street program. This initiative was catalyzed largely by one person in the municipal government, the mayor, who had both strong and weak ties to other individuals in the town. This helped her develop a small coalition dedicated to this effort. Individuals with connections to power and resources as well as those with specific personal assets and capabilities were selected intentionally. This effort was facilitated by Shelby, a young business owner, who intentionally developed a culture of inclusion in the group, protecting the small group from those within the borough council who might erode their efforts, while simultaneously connecting with the broader community to ensure feedback from them. This small group, with good representation from across social fields within the community, sought support from within the community as well as outside through its weak ties. It eventually expanded to include other social fields from across the community when members recognized they needed greater connections and input. They utilized weak and strong ties in order to be successful in the creation of the Clearfield Revitalization Corporation and application to the New Communities Main Street program.

The innovation in this community was mixed. The organizing process, specifically the visioning experience within the organizing process, produced several initiatives (innovations) that were considered and enacted, rather than only adopting the Main Street Program. The organizing efforts within the community in the beginning lacked institutional innovation, they relied on existing frameworks and were rather
limited in scope to who was able to participated (and in actuality, the visioning group failed to meet much beyond the visioning process).

The institutional innovation that became a new way for organizing in the community was associated with the adoption of the Main Street Program. Due to the efforts of Jennifer, the mayor, and Shelby, the young businesswoman who coordinated the group, wider representation from across the community occurred, and this group connected in ways previously not utilized within the community before. This effort could also be considered a form of social entrepreneurship due to the explicit social focus of the organizing process (Dees, 2001). While the initial stages of the organizing process were limited to only a few social fields, the implementation phase opened up to include numerous people across multiple social fields, with an explicit emphasis on increasing the well-being of the entire community, placing this latter part of the organizing process within a community field rather than only a social field (Wilkinson, 1999).

**Titusville Case Study**

This section outlines the Titusville case study. Titusville was chosen because it was one of the first applicants to the Pennsylvania Main Street Program. Additionally, information on the Titusville Renaissance organization’s website (the organization that instituted the Main Street Program in Titusville) indicated this was a community-led initiative, not one instituted by the municipal government. This case study provides a historical narrative on the city of Titusville, a current snapshot of the city, details on the community’s organizing process, and a summary of the process that includes the social networks involved in the process.
Titusville Historical Narrative

This historical narrative relies upon data collected in my archival data research as well as my key informant interviews in Titusville (question 1 in the community level Main Street contact, citizens in the initial core group, and citizens involved along the way questions found in Appendix C). Titusville is located in northwestern Pennsylvania. It is fairly geographically isolated, with the nearest large city being Erie, Pennsylvania, population 101,786 (US Census, 2015), located 45 miles away. It is located within 136 miles of Cleveland, population 390,113, and 104 miles of Pittsburgh, population 305,841 (distance was determined by Google Maps (2014) and population size was determined by the US Census (2014) unless noted otherwise. Titusville is located on two important local waterways, Pine Creek and Oil Creek. Figure 12 shows the location of Titusville.

Figure 12: Map of Titusville, Pennsylvania
Source: Google (2014)
Titusville has a very famous history as the birthplace of the oil industry. The town, however, began in 1795 as a settlement founded by Jonathan Titus and Samuel Kerr (Hickman & Minet, 1935; Weber, 2004). The settlement attracted Irish, Ulster Scottish, and Pennsylvania German settlers (Weber, 2004). It began as a hub for the lumber industry, with significant agricultural production as well. In 1798, the first sawmill opened, and by the early 1800s there were 20 sawmills on Oil Creek (Weber, 2004). In 1847, the settlement was officially established as the borough of Titusville (Weber, 2004).

Locals knew that there was a greasy substance that would sometimes flow from springs close to Pine Creek and Oil Creek (Weber, 2004). Exploration of this substance led to the world’s first oil lease in 1853 (Weber, 2004). In 1859, Edwin Drake and William A. “Uncle Billy” Smith established the first oil well in Titusville, the start of the oil industry (Hickman and Minet, 1935; Weber, 2004). In 1859, the population of Titusville was just 350 people, and by the next year the population had boomed to 6,000 permanent residents and 2,000 transitory residents (Weber, 2004).

The oil boom in the 1860s brought the railroad to Titusville (Weber, 2004), which influenced the decision to incorporate Titusville as a city in 1866 (Weber, 2004). Immigrants moving to Titusville were largely from Poland, Croatia, Ukraine, and Finland, as well as from surrounding areas in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania (Weber, 2004). During this time the lumber industry continued to flourish and boom due to the need for infrastructure and housing for the oil industry (Weber, 2004).

In the late 1800s, Titusville was able to survive the sudden burst of the oil industry bubble, due to its economic foundations in lumber and agriculture. During the
late 1800s, the economy was further diversifying to include manufacturing and steel production, to reduce the city’s reliance on oil (Weber, 2004). The tanning industry took hold between the 1890s and early 1920s, with Titusville having one of the largest independent tanneries in the US (Weber, 2004). Manufacturing would be a driving force of Titusville’s economy until the 1940s (Weber, 2004).

The second half of the twentieth century saw steady decline in Titusville. The last oil refinery shut down in 1950 (Weber, 2004). While the invention and production of plastic helped to fuel the economy in Titusville following World War II, this too eventually waned (Weber, 2004). By the 1960s, many downtown retail and service businesses closed. While Titusville has made efforts to revitalize its commercial enterprises, the area has not been able to regain its former prominence since its peak at the dawn of the oil industry, indicated two interview participants.

**Current Demographic and Economic Snapshot of Titusville**

This current snapshot relies upon data collected in my archival data research, personal observations in the site, and key informant interviews (question 1 in the community level Main Street contact, citizens in the initial core group, and citizens involved along the way questions found in Appendix C). Driving to Titusville, you can experience its seclusion. While it is located close to some smaller towns in the area, it feels out of the way to drive there, unless you are specifically seeking something in the city itself. This is due to the lack of highway access. There is little foot traffic downtown, except, on the day I visited, in the long line to the food bank and soup kitchen. The downtown has a sense of history to it, with unique architecture. However, many of the
businesses occupying the storefronts are nonprofits and social services, with a few for-profit businesses scattered throughout. There is noticeable disrepair to the infrastructure and buildings. However, as you go through town, you see several plaques highlighting the town’s history, indicating a pride for Titusville’s roots. Additionally, as you drive by the historic mansions that were likely built in the height of the opulence of the early oil boom, you can see clear evidence of restoration in these residential areas.

As of July 1, 2013, the population was estimated to be 5,431, with a median age of 40.1 (US Census, 2014). The largest employers of Titusville residents are education services, and health care and social assistance (30.5%); manufacturing (17.2%); arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services (11.7%); retail trade (10.3%); and other services, except public administration (8.1%). The median income is $26,903.

**Titusville Community Organizing Process**

Titusville has a very active Chamber of Commerce, whose mission it is to serve the needs of the city’s business community. In the mid-1980s, the chamber board, comprised of Titusville business members, hired a woman named Susan Davis as executive director. From the beginning, she emphasized the need to develop partnerships across the entire community in order to strengthen the business community. “If the chamber doesn’t work well with the city government, the redevelopment authority, the college, the hospital, the school district, then you have an ineffective Chamber,” she remarked in her interview as her working philosophy. This was atypical for the community, but something she knew to be vital to organizing. She initiated a meeting of
chamber directors from her eight-county region every three months, to share ideas and best practices for strengthening not just their individual communities but the entire region as well.

Once per year, the state Chamber of Commerce held a three-day meeting for all chamber directors. While at this meeting in the late 1980s, Susan was talking to a director from a community close to Philadelphia that had just become involved in the Main Street Program. She had not heard of the program before, but based upon her initial information, she thought it might be a good fit for Titusville. Once she arrived back at Titusville from this meeting, she sought greater information from the state, travelling to Harrisburg to meet with individuals there to learn more about the program. She arranged a meeting with a state-level contact and the local Chamber board, who were very receptive to the idea of establishing a Main Street Program in Titusville.

At this time, Susan became aware that her hometown of Brookville, Pennsylvania, was a Main Street community, and a member of her high school graduating class was the Main Street manager there. She travelled to Brookville, spending three days there, and learned more about what it took from the community’s perspective to institute a Main Street program.

After returning from Brookville, she discussed the idea in greater depth with the Chamber board. They agreed to pursue it, but as a group they knew they would need greater community acceptance and broader awareness of this initiative if it were to be successful. They developed an invitation list to a meeting to discuss the Main Street Program. The board wanted to focus solely on the business community. Susan pushed back against this sentiment, indicating a need for representation by a wide cross-section
of the community, including municipal government, the development authority, residents, and organization representatives. She felt strongly that people needed to first understand what the Chamber was doing, and secondly that the whole community would benefit from it. The entire community therefore needed to be involved. “We need to let the community know. First of all what the chamber’s doing, and secondly, the benefits and how they’re all going to benefit from it in the long run, it will be a community benefit” indicated one interview participant.

The Chamber board publicized the meeting widely, personally inviting people through the board members’ individual social networks. They hosted Susan’s friend from Brookville to present on that city’s Main Street program, and provided opportunity for the public to ask questions and provide feedback. At this meeting the board voted, and decided that the Chamber had enough support to pursue the Main Street program.

With this public support, Susan then put together a proposal for Titusville, which included a list of the best assets in downtown, what the downtown needed, and a plan for a designated Main Street district. She then presented this proposal at the next Chamber board meeting. The board provided feedback and granted her permission to apply to the state to become a Main Street community. Additionally, they made sure to get feedback from the greater public while they put together the application.

“We wanted to keep the citizens involved, we needed them to really spearhead this, because it is about business, but it is for the restoration of our community from pretty much the downtown center out, because as your main street program grows, it can really encompass many things,” said one interview participant.
During the generation of the application, the Chamber developed a 501c3 called Titusville Renaissance to administer the Main Street Program. Susan sought out individuals for the board of directors who would be geographically part of the Main Street district. She intentionally sought out both large and small business owners, and the redevelopment authority and the municipal government each had a seat. She also sought out individuals who were not necessarily the most involved or the most prominent in the community to diversify the individuals involved in community activities. One interview participant indicated:

“Everybody from the redevelopment authority had a seat [on the Main Street Board], the city had a seat, chamber had a seat, various business leaders in town, and maybe some business owners, a couple of small business owners, and it was a really good cross section, it wasn’t just what the people who you always saw in the newspaper who did everything. We brought in other people to start training other people.”

As Titusville Renaissance continued to work on the Main Street application, it sought out participation in the Main Street program from a cross-section of community members, intentionally training numerous people on the Main Street approach in order to increase the capacity of the community to keep the program moving forward.

The group submitted its application, and Titusville was awarded Main Street community status. At this time, the state provided funding in the amount of $20,000 the first year, $10,000 the second year, and $5,000 the third year, requiring just 10% in matching local funds. To collect local funds, the Main Street program was based on
membership, which required businesses and organizations to pay dues, similar to the Chamber’s funding structure.

Titusville Renaissance is still active today, although support for the organization is waning, especially in the municipal government. Titusville is no longer a Main Street designated community, but still uses the Main Street approach.

**Titusville Community Organizing Structure**

Figure 13 displays the structure of Titusville’s community organizing process. Again, this is not meant to be a display of the actual social networks involved, but only a representation of the process, due to incomplete data. This serves as a summary for the community organizing process in Titusville. As in the previous case study, the circles (nodes) represent individuals in the processes, and the lines indicate social ties between
the individuals. While the ties may have existed previously, these ties are representative of the connection between nodes associated with these specific processes. To determine the strength of the ties, qualifiers of the ties from interview transcripts such as friends and family were used to indicate stronger ties to another node. Weak ties were indicated by participants as those connections between acquaintances, colleagues, or newly established connections. The arrows on the ties indicate directionality of the ties. The color of the nodes indicates the social fields they represent, though individuals typically represented more than one social field. The social fields were determined through interview participants.

The process began with Susan, the local Chamber of Commerce executive director, learning about the Main Street program through an external source. She then researched the program further, connecting to external resources. She then joined with her board of directors, to whom she had strong ties, and connected them to an external individual who could explain the Main Street program further, though this group was limited in its representation in the community. The board agreed to move forward with efforts to gain greater support from across the Titusville community. Susan then connected to another source outside the community by using her weak ties to her hometown.

Through the weak and strong ties of both Susan and the Chamber board, they were able to get a wide cross-section of individuals representing multiple social fields including municipal government, business owners, and residents of Titusville, all sharing both weak and strong ties, to attend a meeting where Susan’s external connection presented on the program. Susan intentionally facilitated the inclusion of multiple
stakeholder groups and social fields, to increase awareness of the Chamber and gain greater access to human capital and financial assets. At this meeting, the broader community was able to ask questions, provide feedback, and formally support the pursuit of the Main Street program for Titusville.

After receiving support, Susan developed recommendations for the Chamber board. Once the board approved the recommendations, it initiated the creation of a board for the Titusville Renaissance nonprofit, as well as the application to the Main Street program. To form this board, the Chamber board and Susan intentionally sought out individuals who had not previously been heavily involved in the community, using weak ties as well as creating new ties to these individuals that represented several social fields across the community. This new group represented municipal government, prominent businesses, and small businesses. This dedicated group of individuals put together the application materials, while seeking out greater connection to other business owners and town residents to help in the creation of the committees and serve as volunteers for events.

The innovation in this case was relegated to the organizing process itself. The community only entertained the idea of adopting the Main Street Program, not truly exploring multiple ideas for implementation. However, the institutional innovation was very important to this community. Through Susan’s efforts, she catalyzed the creation of a new way of organizing for the community that involved individuals across multiple social fields with the expressed purpose of affecting the whole community, not solely focusing on the business community or the downtown. Therefore, this innovation
occurred within a community field, rather than a more limited social field (Wilkinson, 1999).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented two case studies from Pennsylvania, Clearfield and Titusville, of community organizing processes that led to participation in the Pennsylvania Main Street Program. Pennsylvania institutes this program through the Pennsylvania Downtown Center, a non-profit organization contracted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Main Street Program is instituted in communities in Pennsylvania primarily by a non-profit (501(c)3) organization that is separate from any governmental agency; though a small amount of local Main Street programs are directly involved with a municipal government. This requires communities to create a non-profit organization along with developing an application for the Main Street Program.

The case of Clearfield presented a community organizing process that was resident driven, outside of the municipal government that was seen as ineffective by those involved in the organizing process. However, the organizing process began with a limited representation of social fields and was heavily dependent local individuals in positions of power. As the process progressed, there was an intentional effort by two key individuals to open up the organizing process to include others that were more representative of multiple social fields in the community of Clearfield. While an emphasis on the downtown was explicit in their efforts, the organizing efforts tended to be more inclusive of the greater community rather than only emphasizing the downtown Main Street district and business sector.
Titusville’s organizing process, the second case study in this chapter, originated from efforts by the Chamber of Commerce. However, the local champion of the organizing effort insisted on including a wide array of individuals that represented multiple social fields across the community. The emphasis of the organizing process was to improve the downtown, with a focus on improving the economic sector of the community.
Chapter 6

Analysis and Discussion
In this chapter, I present my analysis of the four case studies, using the conceptual framework on innovation and communities based in the literature review. This analysis draws upon the case study narratives in the previous two chapters. I add nuance to the case study narratives by including additional data from the key informant interviews from the state level Main Street contact (questions 4 and 7), local level Main Street contact (questions 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9), and the local citizens (the initial core group questions and citizens involved along the way questions 2-5) at each site. These interview questions can be found in Appendix C. Specifically these are the questions with regard to the process of becoming part of the Main Street program and the social networks of individuals involved.

I begin with the two Michigan case studies and analyze each case according to the conceptual framework, identifying strengths of each process, and identifying ways in which the structure of the organization process might be modified to increase the potential for innovation in the future. In order to determine the degree of success for each case, I took into account several items. First, I compared the organizing process to the innovation conceptual framework process, noting how closely the community’s process mimicked the flow of the innovation conceptual framework. I examined the diversity (or lack thereof) of social fields within the community’s process. I also compared the activation of social networks within the community’s process as compared to the ideal setting within the innovation conceptual framework. I then compare the two Michigan case studies, highlighting key similarities and differences. I then replicate this process for the Pennsylvania cases. Finally, I compare these results across the two states,
and then across all four cases, while highlighting important conclusions learned from these cases.

**Michigan Case Studies Analysis**

The following section details the analyses of the two Michigan case studies. First, the Blissfield case study analysis is presented, followed by the Portland case study analysis. The section concludes with a cross-case analysis.

**Blissfield Case Study Analysis**

The history of Blissfield has greatly impacted both the town’s culture and the documented community organizing process. The area’s reliance on natural resources and manufacturing led to many economic peaks and valleys, due to the lack of economic diversity. This made it difficult to maintain a downtown area with enough infrastructure and purchasing power to support local businesses. The location of Blissfield among larger population centers put it at greater risk of competition. One interview participant remarked,

“The small communities [like Blissfield] have taken a real beating to compete with malls and big box stores and things like that. And so a lot of what you term your mom and pop businesses have not been as successful. You know you don’t have your, generally speaking, your little groceries and meat markets and those kinds of things, pharmacies, and what have you, that are able to compete against the big box stores.”
Transportation changes in the region also affected the local economic and cultural identity. The growth of highways affected the local economy’s ability to compete, because they decreased support for the rail system and at the same time encouraged commuting to larger urban areas for work. It also enabled the area’s transformation into a bedroom community, where people live but do not necessarily work or shop.

These changes required local leaders to define the city’s future identity, to ensure its ability to meet the needs of local residents. However, Blissfield’s location, and the tendency of its residents to commute elsewhere to find work has mixed impacts. While it has increased competition faced by the businesses in town, it likely helps explain the current household economic standing, as evidenced by its median income. Blissfield’s median household income of $45,133 was higher than the state median income and highest amongst all case study sites. The higher income level in Blissfield suggests that organizing efforts could raise funding to support recent local efforts to address citizen needs and concerns.

While the household income remains high in Blissfield, a long-term decline in economic activity and physical infrastructure in the town provided the context for the community organizing processes documented in the case study. In the organization process begun by Sarah, the recognition for a need to change came from an external influence (her brother-in-law), albeit in the context of the downtown business and infrastructure decline. Her affection and dedication to her community and to civic activity spurred her to action and kept this sentiment for change from being more than just a fleeting thought. Her “intention” (Mair & Noboa, 2006) or motivation comes from
empathy and a moral judgment that what is happening to the community is “wrong” and she must right that wrong.

Mark, on the other hand, was alerted to conditions inside the community by several business owners, who indicated they might need to close their doors due to the looming national and global financial crisis. This influenced Mark’s motivation and recognition of the need for action. His previous experience in Blissfield and the knowledge he had gained from his years of service in community and economic development as city manager provided the necessary skills and assets to begin an organizing process to meet the needs of the local business community. Mark had a deep feeling of responsibility to the village of Blissfield. Both Sarah and Mark required an external shock to motivate their organizing processes. However, their dedication to the community helped them move their recognition of a need to do something into action.

As both Sarah and Mark began to act, both connected with other individuals with whom they had close ties, indicated by how they described the closeness of their relationships to these people. Sarah first connected with people she considered friends and colleagues in the community, who represented several social fields, including the business community, residents, family, and council members (each individual in actuality representing more than one social field). Through her connections she found positive reinforcement from these individuals to assist her in her community organizing process.

Mark also connected with others, but his role in municipal government meant that his connections were only within the confines of city council and the downtown development authority. While the city council members represented various social fields across the community, the emphasis on this specific social field of municipal government
ultimately limited the ability to gain support from a broader cross-section of the community. The council saw it as their role to take action in the community as part of their responsibilities to the community. As Mark performed his research on options for the community council to consider to address the looming economic issues facing Blissfield, the city council provided positive feedback.

Both Sarah and Mark moved from a recognition-of-need phase into an idea formation phase because of the support of other community members. These community members were dedicated to changing the current context of Blissfield to meet their local needs, a critical element identified in the conceptual framework (Lester & Piore, 2004; O’Connor, 2003). The individuals Sarah initially sought out for feedback on her ideas, for instance, identified others who would be beneficial to include in these efforts. These individuals were both acquaintances and friends who were perceived to be able to lend greater access to resources such as knowledge, money, and connection to specific organizations, again representing multiple social fields. This group was fairly small at the beginning of the process, and the group began meeting at Sarah’s home. Sarah intentionally encouraged and facilitated connections among the members of this group and across social fields through the structure of the meetings, a critical component in the development of innovative ideas (Burt, 2004; Johansson, 2003). Before addressing issues in the community at group meetings, she allowed time for sharing unrelated conversations and topics over a meal. Additionally, as she facilitated these meetings, the agenda of items to discuss was formulated by all members of the group.

Through these mechanisms, Sarah created stronger connections among the group members, and developed a culture based on trust and support. Through this structure, she
helped people to feel safe to express any type of idea for meeting the community’s needs. She also had respect from and connections to the city council. The trust involved in this relationship with the council allowed her to shelter the group’s efforts and ideas from council control. She was also able to protect the ideas presented within her group from being rejected by individuals in positions in external structures. One interview participant said of the group, “[we] came to participate and be involved in something positive…[we] all shared the same excitement when there was something, a good idea, let’s do this and [we] couldn’t wait, because you could see the improvement, whatever was gonna happen, it instantly appeared so who wouldn’t be excited?” She was able to utilize her reputation as an involved and dedicated citizen to help the council see the necessity of her group and to allow them to move forward as long as they did not break any laws or regulations. This allowed Sarah’s group to work around the formal structures such as council and the local DDA that they viewed as being unable to meet the needs they perceived to be crucial to the community’s wellbeing.

Mark, on the other hand, worked within formal political structures to identify ways to change the current practices of municipal government to better address the needs of citizens. He engaged city council, the downtown development authority, and the Chamber of Commerce to explore ideas to assist business owners and citizens in Blissfield. He used his role in municipal government to leverage weak ties to external resources, to identify resources and programs that could assist the village to change its practices. The Main Street Program was of particular interest. Additionally, because of his experience, reputation, and long history within the community, Mark was able to create a culture in his group that allowed it to explore opportunities and ideas to address
the needs identified in the community. However, this group was fairly limited in representation of social fields across the community.

As Sarah’s group expanded, it continued to meet and discuss ideas for meeting the community’s needs. This would require the process to simultaneously be in a need recognition phase and idea formation phase. While the group that met at her house remained relatively small, about 15 to 20 people at most, it also engaged community organizations and individuals outside the group (though internal to the community), to gain access to resources such as publicity for events in the local newspaper, donations from local agencies, or volunteers at events.

The line between idea formation and implementation was blurred for Sarah’s group. The group members would meet and simultaneously discuss new ideas for meeting community needs and plans for implementing initiatives. They would sometimes have several implementation processes occurring simultaneously, while also carrying out new idea formation processes based on feedback from the community from previous initiatives such as park cleanups and repairs to structures downtown. This part of the process was complicated and not clear cut. At times it attracted others to become part of the core group, while others stepped away due to time commitments and personal issues.

As these initiatives of Sarah’s group were occurring, the individuals involved in Mark’s group became dedicated to the idea of bringing the Main Street program to Blissfield. Mark was also involved in Sarah’s group, and asked that Sarah join the group interested in the Main Street program and that specific community organizing effort. The membership of Mark’s group stayed relatively constant during the idea formation phase. These individuals continued to connect with people outside the community to explore
resources for bringing Main Street to Blissfield. Sarah’s joining Mark’s group, the issues associated with bringing external meals to a meeting in a formal space, and the overlap of people involved in the two separate efforts led to these two community organizing efforts being combined.

At the same time, the multiple existing implementation processes related to the efforts of Sarah’s group were refocused into a singular effort under the Main Street program for Blissfield. Working on this specific goal required adoption of the Main Street idea by the entire community. This required a small group of people to work intensively on creating the materials and organizational structures required to join the Main Street program, while connecting to external people at the state level to ensure the local group navigated the state systems properly. This small group of people represented a wide cross-section of social fields from across the community including the business community, municipal government, DDA, and residents, as presented in Figure 8 in Chapter 4. This group was largely comprised of people who were involved in Sarah’s process, and people who knew each other from their social connections across town. Due to the village’s previous experience with the creation of a downtown development authority district, the planning group intentionally engaged more businesses than just those in the Main Street district to reduce the potential for the Main Street effort to be divisive in the community.

As the two community organizing processes merged, some community members perceived them to be more closely associated with municipal governmental structures. Others in the community became aware of meetings held at Sarah’s house to work on the Main Street program structure and application. They viewed this as a secret group taking
control of government and community affairs. This caused much animosity and created rifts across the community. Sarah and others were personally attacked through the writing of online blog postings and letters to the editor of the local newspaper. While Sarah was deeply hurt by the comments being made, she remained dedicated to the organizing process because of her love for and commitment to the community of Blissfield. Those that were upset over this lack of transparency and exclusivity were intentionally brought into the organizing efforts, in order to ensure greater inclusiveness within the community.

Ultimately, once these two processes combined, a greater representation of social fields from across the community was possible. While many people did overlap between the two processes, ultimately individuals had to decide which process to be more involved in. Combining efforts allowed for people to maximize their time. Additionally, once combined, the group did explore ways to involve others from across the community, like local artists, historians, and more residents.

Eventually, the community did adopt the Main Street program, which unified the organizing in new ways, including other efforts that were occurring separately from this organizing effort. However, during the Main Street Program adoption phase, some individuals who were once part of Sarah’s process lost their roles, due to the local governmental structures of the DDA that assumed control and implementation of the Main Street Program. Those that were involved in Mark’s process saw this as a great opportunity, specifically Mark himself, to open this up to include others from the community, rather than rely solely on the municipal government. Those involved with Mark’s process recognized the need to involve others, because they knew they could not carry out this work on their own. One interview participant from Mark’s group noted,
“…we were going to need more resources beyond what the chamber or the DDA had, you know we needed other people.”

When relating this organizing process to the conceptual model, the organizing process in Blissfield was largely successful in several regards. The organizing process in this case did connect individuals across various social fields with a diversity of capacities and capabilities within the community field, yielding several innovative ideas implemented in the community. Additionally, while the community organizing efforts in this community were focused on developing creative initiatives as products to address community-identified issues, the organizing processes they developed for doing so can also be seen as a form of institutional innovation (development of new structures to guide human behavior (Van De Ven and Hargrave, 2004; Hargrave and Van De Ven, 2006)). While Mark worked within institutional structures already present in the community, Sarah developed structures outside of established channels due to her perception that they were ineffective. Sarah’s group utilized their existing social networks, while also developing new network connections, to develop an organizing structure that was new for this community. The community utilized the Main Streets approach to unify these two efforts, using the approach as a form of institutional innovation for organizing efforts within the community field. Overall, the process followed rather closely the process within the innovation conceptual framework.

I have several recommendations that may have allowed for greater potential for innovative ideas. Two of these related to the idea formation phase and one refers to the implementation phase. First, within Sarah’s group’s idea formation phase, before the merger of the two processes, it may have been beneficial to create new connections with
individuals representing more social fields and capacities from across the community to include additional perspectives. This would have expanded those involved beyond those individuals in Sarah’s existing social connections. This initial group largely emphasized the business community, governmental structures, and residents. I do note that the group of people that interview participants labeled as citizens or residents may likely incorporate additional social fields that they could not describe or of which they were not aware. Secondly, within Mark’s organizing process, before the merger of the two processes, it would have been helpful to also include individuals outside of formal municipal organization structures, to increase representation to include several social fields from across the community. In both processes, this could have increased the amount of creative ideas presented (Johansson, 2003) and strengthened the community field for future community organizing processes (Bridger and Alter, 2008; Wilkinson, 1999).

Finally, during the implementation phase of the combined processes, the creation stage for the Main Street program should have had wider calls for participation from, and better reporting of activity to, the community as a whole. This may have helped assuage the concerns of community members who felt that this was an elite group of individuals trying to assume decision-making power within the community. While increased communication and transparency occurred in response to these concerns during this phase, those concerns may have been prevented by forming new connections and linkages within the community earlier in the implementation phase.
Portland Case Study Analysis

Portland’s ties to the manufacturing and transportation industries created a tumultuous history for the city. While the economic diversity of the town allowed for early expansion through the use of rail lines to transport goods, the decline of the railroads in Michigan put Portland at a significant disadvantage. As the city gained access to interstate highway routes, commerce shifted geographically in order to be more accessible to highway traffic. This created greater competition for downtown businesses, reduced traffic downtown, and contributed to the decline of the downtown. This decline led to a lack of maintenance and upkeep, and gradually the once-flourishing downtown turned into a derelict portion of the city with few advocates.

The election of a new mayor and the hiring of an outside individual as interim city manager provided the needed shock for citizens to recognize the need in and potential for the downtown area of Portland. Jeremy Bronson, in his role as interim city manager, saw great potential for improvement of the downtown. His previous experience in other cities provided his motivation and impetus to act and begin a community organizing process in Portland, although this was also part of his official duty as city manager.

Due to his focus on the downtown area’s potential, Jeremy formed a large coalition of business owners and property owners from across the entire town to build support for creating change in the community. This group, called the Business and Property Owners Committee (BOPOC) was focused primarily within the business social field in the community, with some participation from the municipal government. It lacked participation from other social fields in the community that could have included perspectives outside the business and property community, diversifying ideas on how to
handle the economic downturn in the community while simultaneously building stronger support for addressing issues that affect the community. This group was large and the members were not closely tied to each other or to Jeremy. Jeremy, however, did receive positive feedback from the BOPOC, the city council, and mayor, feedback that prompted further action and allowed for the community organizing process to continue.

As Jeremy sought external support for the initiatives of the city, he was informed of the new Main Street program being established in the state. He saw this as an opportunity for Portland, and the Mayor agreed. Jeremy arranged for the BOPOC to meet with a state official responsible for the Main Street program, and the BOPOC agreed that it was a viable goal to pursue. However, according to the requirements of the Main Street program, the emphasis had to be specifically on the downtown area. This caused rifts among the members of the BOPOC. There was no dedicated coalition among the BOPOC members at this time that could heal these rifts, and except for a few individual efforts, there was no concerted attempt to ensure that business owners from outside the downtown were engaged.

Jeremy also offended some downtown business owners by outlining a vision that alienated non-retail businesses. The failure to create connections among community members, the inability to engage a broad constituent group of business owners, and the failure to develop a trusting environment within the BOPOC all decreased the ability to create a safe space in the idea formation phase. This resulted in the formation of a small coalition of strongly-tied people, representing business owners, municipal government officials, and a couple of residents dedicated to bringing the Main Street Program to Portland. Representation from across the community was very limited.
This small group of people ushered the community organizing process forward into the implementation phase. Much of the momentum came from municipal government at this time, particularly Jeremy and the mayor, utilizing existing local governmental structures to enact the planning process. They were able to gain some additional support in the community for the program, but the rifts caused by the community organizing process limited the program’s appeal. Additionally, because many of the individuals ushering in the program were newer residents, they were seen by other residents as trying to change things in the community too quickly. Many residents viewed the Main Street Program as more of a threat than an asset. The group nevertheless did apply to the Main Street Program, and Portland became one of the first programs in Michigan.

The Portland organizing process was largely unsuccessful. While the community did join the Main Street program as one strategy to address issues in the community, this was largely due to the efforts of a small isolated group in the community. The organizing process began with some potential to be an institutional innovation in the community, bringing together a new group of individuals interested in addressing needs of the business community and Portland more broadly (the BOPOC). However, this group ended up being very limited in representation from multiple social fields that could have provided greater understanding and more ideas to address the issues facing Portland.

Additionally, the organizing became focused around becoming part of the Main Streets Program. Utilizing this as the main driver of organizing activities resulted in the group losing sight of the larger goal of meeting the needs of Portland community members. Finally, once support for the organizing process began to wane, the individuals
involved relied more heavily on formal municipal government structures rather than
developing new ways to connect people from across interest areas and strengthen the
community field. Of note is that the process did follow the general flow of the
conceptual model.

I have several suggestions for altering the structure of Portland’s community
organizing process that may have increased the potential for additional innovation. First,
in the identification of need phase, getting greater buy-in from those who were involved
along with a commitment that they would support the initiative might have been more
effective at creating support for moving into the idea formation phase. This group could
have leveraged its ties to others in the community for continued support throughout the
process.

Second, in the idea formation phase, ensuring that the BOPOC and other
community members could share their views on community issues, as well as solutions,
in a trusting, open environment may have led to fewer rifts in the process. This would
also have required openness by Jeremy and other leaders from the municipal government
to entertain ideas, other than joining Main Street, as a way to address local issues.

Third, the organizing group should have included people who represented
additional social fields in the community, rather than limiting the participants mostly to
municipal government and the business community from the BOPOC. This would
suggest that the BOPOC may not have been the best fit for the organizing effort, as it was
very limited in representation of social fields from across the community. Rather, the
organizing effort should have represented more of the social fields of local perspectives
from across the community as part of the organizing process. Fourth, Jeremy may not
have been the appropriate person to facilitate this process. Facilitating an innovative process requires individuals who can span boundaries, and who can provide a safe space for those involved to explore new ideas, while also helping outsiders see the relevance of the effort and the ideas (Berkun, 2007; Lester & Piore, 2004; Price, 2005). Instead, Jeremy was a decision maker who became focused on Portland becoming part of the Main Street Program, rather than allowing for alternative ideas or options to be pursued. He may not have recognized what was needed to create an inclusive environment and he may not have understood the context or historical narrative of Portland properly.

Finally, in the implementation phase, there should have been participation from people other than just those few involved in the Main Street application. The group should perhaps have gone back to the idea formation phase to receive more feedback from people with greater representation across the community. However, because of time restrictions for the Main Street application and the emphasis on this idea formation phase, the small group working on the application was too focused on this effort to recognize the need for broader support or the need to delay the application to respond to feedback from the broader community. Had they not focused so greatly on creating the application, and taken greater time to build better connections across the community, their process could have been more inclusive and would have been more successful overall.

**Michigan Cross-Case Analysis**

There are several key considerations in comparing the Michigan case studies, given their context within the state. Similarities in the two case study communities are described first, followed by differences that uniquely affected the innovation process in
each community. First, the two cases both followed the general flow of the innovation conceptual framework. This indicates that community organizing and community development processes may be another form of innovation, as they seem to follow a similar flow as indicated within the business innovation literature.

Secondly, the economic downturns that both towns went through mirrored that of the state as a whole. This is an important consideration, because issues that face the state’s economy can directly translate into issues facing local residents and businesses in individual towns. External economic forces can affect the ability of these towns to leverage local and state financial support for community needs, especially with declining state resources, causing a general decline over time.

A third similarity is that both communities used their local downtown development authorities to enable the implementation of a state level program. This requires that local individuals understand how to access state programs and funding, while ensuring that local structures can accommodate these programs. Likewise, it is necessary that state agencies remain abreast of the practicality of implementing programs in local municipalities, and that they provide the appropriate training and education for citizens to implement these programs. In Portland, for example, the local residents may have needed additional guidance from the state on how to negotiate the development of a Main Street district without creating animosity among community members. It is also necessary that the state respond to feedback on programs in order to best meet local needs. Feedback from Portland and other communities caused Michigan to implement a different structure for its Main Street program, creating the impetus to move to a graduated program with Associate, Select, and Master levels.
Finally, ties to the state, both those already existing and those developed during the two towns’ experiences, enabled local citizens to gain access to new ideas and information essential to their community organizing processes. The development of ties to local communities through outreach efforts by state agencies ensured clear communication of opportunities open to the community, and can provide needed resources that may enhance the innovation in community organizing processes. However, care needs to be taken in this outreach. If programs are too strongly emphasized as the best option for a community, it may limit the ability of local peoples to develop their own ideas with regard to how to address their self-identified needs. For example, in the case of Portland, the push from local decision makers to become part of the Main Street program limited the creation of viable alternative options that could have better suited the local community’s needs. Alternatively, in Blissfield, local leaders utilized the state agency as a way to connect and inform their own organizing processes.

With regard to differences between the two cases, the largest is their use of social fields within their processes. In Blissfield, wide representation was a key part to the process (although Mark’s was limited in scope). In Portland, the emphasis was less on gaining broad representation of social fields, and more on moving forward in applying to the Main Street Program even though others were resistant. In this regard, Blissfield was much more successful in terms of the innovation in their community than Portland. The process in Blissfield resulted in new connections and ways of interaction within the community field. Portland’s process was limited and ended up lacking in diversity, making the organizing effort more limited to a social field concerned mostly with the business community.
Pennsylvania Case Studies Analysis

This section outlines the analysis for the Pennsylvania Case Studies. The analysis of the Clearfield case is presented first, and the Titusville case follows. The section finishes with a cross-community analysis.

Clearfield Case Study Analysis

Clearfield’s economic cycles of prosperity and decline are in keeping with the rest of Pennsylvania, due to a heavy reliance on the coal, steel, and brick industries. The most recent decline in Clearfield’s economy has been very drastic, and many residents left, seeking employment elsewhere. This decreased the human capital available in the area. Additionally, local government officials were not able to deliver on business development which added to residents’ skepticism about the possibility of an upturn for Clearfield. This created a culture of complacency about the town’s decline, as indicated through interview participants’ comments.

However, with natural gas extraction increasing the prospects for a new period of growth for Clearfield, local residents recognized that these changes had the potential to reshape the community. The historical decline, combined with this economic opportunity, provided the impetus for action by one local leader, Donovan Parker, who had been engaged in several other local organizing efforts. His role as a successful local business leader with close connections to other business people and organization leaders in Clearfield provided him access to important financial resources and organizational knowledge. He also had many weak ties to resources outside of Clearfield, through his
political engagement and experience with state and national organizations. When he spoke to a local group of financially and organizationally powerful individuals, he received support and access to resources in order to move the organizing process from the need recognition phase into an idea formation phase.

This small coalition of closely-tied people largely represented local businesses and community organizations. The group recognized the need for greater input in order to develop innovative ideas to meet the needs of Clearfield residents. To assist in facilitating this process, they sought assistance outside the community, creating a new connection with Chris Jones of Penn State Extension. Through conversations with Chris, they decided to perform a community visioning process, which required inviting stakeholders from across the community to assist in developing a community vision for the future.

This group of stakeholders was very exclusive, including only those individuals in positions of power and influence from local businesses, health care organizations, educational institutions, and municipal and civic organizations, to ensure that resources could be leveraged to assist in the implementation stage. During the idea formation phase, the option arose to pursue the Main Street program through Pennsylvania’s New Communities initiative. This possibility was championed by the mayor, Jennifer Brown, although several other ideas were also developed. Each idea led to its own implementation phase.

The core group of individuals that Donovan convened continued to play a significant role in the outcome of the visioning process. These individuals supported the process’s efforts both with their internal and external connections, and with their personal financial contributions. This enabled the community to move into the implementation
phase, with the Main Street program being one of the ideas the group chose to implement. There were, however, several projects in the implementation phase occurring at the same time as a result of the visioning process. Each project had its own timeline and degree of success. Simultaneous implementation phases influenced one another. This lead some individuals to focus more on one idea than another, limiting the ability to leverage funding and volunteers for the Main Street Program. Multiple projects were underway, but not all of the innovative ideas from the formation phases were adopted. People were upset that there was not enough funding to implement all of the ideas, and it limited financial support for the Main Street Program because others were interested in funding only their specific projects at the time.

The contributions by the mayor and Shelby Freeman, a local business woman who became a facilitator, were major contributing factors in the successful movement from the idea formation phase to the implementation phase for the Main Street program. Jennifer helped to develop the dedicated group of individuals who moved the idea of the Main Street program from the idea creation phase into the formation phase, by locating individuals from local business and civic organizations with specific skills and positional power in Clearfield. The members of this group originally included some people who were strongly tied, but most members were weakly tied across the social fields of the business community, the community’s non-governmental/nonprofit organizations, municipal government, and residents. Additionally, Jennifer intentionally excluded individuals from certain organizations, specifically the city council, whom she believed would not help create a safe space committed to change through the adoption of the Main
Street program in Clearfield. This ultimately led to her being ousted as mayor. One interview informant indicated,

“It was definitely a tough election, some of the Borough Council Members definitely didn’t agree how she was shaking things up so much, she ended up losing that election. And so after that, she got out of everything, including Main Street, and that’s kind of where we took off on our own.”

By sheltering the group from the Borough Council, she allowed for the community organizing process associated with the Main Street program to continue.

Once the small group of dedicated people associated with developing the Main Street program for Clearfield became established, the leadership of Shelby Freeman also played a vital role in the adoption of the Main Street program and Clearfield’s application to the New Communities initiative. Shelby recognized the need to connect with individuals associated with Donovan and the core organizing group, people who were in positions of power and influence in the community, but she also realized the need to bring in others from additional social fields in the community.

Freeman was raised in the area, and her family had a good reputation, which helped local people trust her. Because she had recently moved back to Clearfield, she did not have a previous history and narrative of involvement in local initiatives with organizations and businesses. Her reputation and status as someone raised locally, however, allowed her to create new connections across the community, including with residents from other social fields not previously well represented in the process prior to this point. She was able to act as a liaison between groups, creating greater ties across the
community in order to increase support for the Main Street program. She also protected the organizing process from possibly negative influences, which could have halted the process. Had these negative issues been dealt with earlier, the mayor may not have been ousted. Ultimately, the community organizing process led to the creation of the Clearfield Revitalization Corporation, a nonprofit organization, and its successful application to the Main Street program through the Pennsylvania New Communities initiative.

Overall, the Clearfield organizing process had some success. While the visioning process was limited in representation from the broader community, it did provide options for pursuing new ideas to meet the needs of Clearfield. However, the largest success was the institutional innovation associated with the organizing process. Due to a municipal government that was unwilling to entertain new ideas for meeting needs of local community members, a new structure was created to understand and meet community needs. The initial phases of the process were limited in representation from across the community, the latter phases that involved the Main Street program were more successful at developing a more representative and inclusive structure for assessing and meeting community needs within the community field. Overall, the community’s process did follow the trajectory of the innovation conceptual framework.

I have several recommendations for the structure of the community organizing process based upon this analysis. First, during the idea formation phase, greater connections across social fields and with people of varying levels of power may have increased the innovativeness of ideas. Specifically, adding in residents who were not associated with specific businesses or organizations, as well as including business people who were not top level managers and owners, may have increased the diversity of skills
and knowledge available to the group, and may have led to a greater potential for innovativeness. Second, in moving to the implementation phase, it may have been more beneficial to examine the timelines of the implementation of all of the ideas, to increase the chances of adopting multiple ideas. Given limited resources, both in terms of financial and human capital in the community, prioritizing and rolling out these ideas into implementation in stages may have increased their successful adoption. Ultimately, having multiple groups with different goals splintered interests and efforts. Had these groups had a chance to connect more and share information between them and developed a better plan for implementation that was more reflective of the resources available, it would have developed greater trust that those initiatives would be carried out.

**Titusville Case Study Analysis**

Titusville’s early boom from the oil industry left the city with a legacy both of economic success and reliance on natural resource extraction. While the economy tried to diversify in the late 1800s and early 1900s by expanding into manufacturing, the local economy was still very dependent upon the success of the petroleum industry. As that industry declined in the region, Titusville’s economy, infrastructure, and population have also waned. The overall decline over the course of nearly a century, coupled with the town’s rather secluded location, placed the town in the situation of lacking the ability to meet the needs of the community’s residents. Organizations in the community were consistently looking for ways to build community capacity and meet local needs.

The hiring of Susan Davis as the executive director of the local Chamber of Commerce gave her the impetus to examine the current economic atmosphere and needs
of Titusville. She had the strong backing of the Chamber board to explore options for the town, which enabled her to move into the idea formation phase of the community organizing process. In her role at the Chamber, she specifically examined ways to help out the business community, but she also emphasized the need to make connections across the community and across multiple social fields including municipal government, the business community, and residents. The movement between the identification of need phase and idea formation phase was not clear cut. The Chamber board was her strongest connection, but her creation of connections outside the Chamber likely led to a greater understanding of the community’s needs.

As Susan became more connected to others within the community, she recognized the needs of the business community and of the residents of Titusville as a whole. Through her connections outside the community, she gained access to other resources and approaches to help meet these community needs. One such experience came through her connection to another Chamber director at a state event, through which she learned about the Main Street program. She brought this information back to her local Chamber board, who agreed that the program was a worthy endeavor to research further. With their support, she then continued to create new external connections, gathering more information about the Main Street program.

During the idea formation phase, Susan and the board recognized that if this idea was to move into the implementation phase, they would need wide participation and support across social fields. While the board wanted to focus solely on the business social field, Susan emphasized the need to connect to a wide cross-section of the community, making it a true community program. She and the board used their current connections
and also created additional connections, forming a large group that became interested in learning more about the Main Street program. This group met with an external individual to learn more about the program, and took a vote that indicated their interest in pursuing the Main Street program. Through this experience, Susan was able to gather support from local individuals interested in putting together the application for the Main Street program. This allowed her to move into the implementation phase of the community organizing process.

At first, Susan was the main catalyst of the application. Through her connections, the board’s connections, and the public meeting, a dedicated group of people formed, representing multiple social fields. Importantly, these individuals were not historically the most active in public affairs. They included both well-established individuals and newcomers to Titusville. This was done specifically to build community capacity for leadership, while still being able to access resources through specific individuals from certain important social fields like municipal government and the business community. By intentionally working across these social fields and creating a representation of the community as a whole, this core group was able to successfully work across boundaries and develop the application to the Main Street program. The core group eventually morphed into the Titusville Renaissance board, the nonprofit that housed the Main Street program. The Main Street program streamlined and unified efforts that were focused on the entire community. This helped produce wider community support.

Titusville’s success in the process was mixed. The process in Titusville ended in the opportunity to join the Main Street Program, but this was the only idea considered at the time. The process emphasized the Main Street Program as its end goal, limiting other
opportunities to meet the needs of local residents. However, the process was intentionally inclusive during the idea formation and implementation phases to include individuals that represented social fields across the community, individuals that were not already connected to organizing processes, and connecting other organizing efforts. In this manner, they were successful at developing an innovative approach to their community organizing effort that strengthened the community field. Overall, the process did follow the innovation conceptual framework.

The structure of the Titusville community organizing process was commendable, with much of it following an ideal of what could create the best possible opportunities for innovative ideas to address community needs. However, the process could have been modified during the idea formation phase to create more diversity among those involved in the organizing process. Having greater diversity could lead to creating a core group of people who could help better identify ideas to meet the needs of the community as a whole. However, due to Susan’s role with the Chamber, this modification may not have been practical for this specific community organizing process. Overall, Susan helped to facilitate wide connections across multiple social fields in the community to ensure that there was support within the community for bringing the Main Street program to Titusville.

**Pennsylvania Cross-Case Analysis**

A comparison of the two Pennsylvania cases raises some specific considerations of interest. First, as with the Michigan cases, the organizing processes in Clearfield and Titusville followed the same general trajectory of the innovation conceptual framework.
While Clearfield struggled through various issues in the first part of the process, they eventually found ways to include greater community participation in the latter part of their process. Both were met with mixed successes overall. They both developed new organizing arrangements and connections, creating innovation within their community fields. However, they both had mixed issues with connecting across multiple social fields at various parts of their processes, potentially limiting the development of innovative ideas to tackle their community identified issues.

Second, the economic hardships that faced these communities were linked to the state’s overall industrial history and decline. The waning of the oil, coal, and steel industries in Pennsylvania had a negative effect on the economic well-being of these communities. These declines affected the capacity of the towns to meet the needs of their citizens. A diverse economy is essential to create the possibility of resilience over time.

Third, both communities utilized the creation of nonprofits to institute the Main Street program. This is largely due to the lack of funds available from municipal governments. The creation and implementation of the nonprofit, along with the implementation of the Main Street program, required more effort in these towns than if they did not have to create this new organization. This required citizens to have the capacity to administer a nonprofit organization and navigate state and federal systems to meet their local needs, while simultaneously learning the Main Street approach and developing the structures to implement this program. In both cases, informants indicated their desire for either greater support or an easier model for housing the Main Street program locally, because navigating both nonprofit development and Main Street application processes in tandem proved excessively challenging. When instituting
programs aimed at local implementation, state agencies and organizations need to ensure that they provide support as well as opportunities for feedback from the local citizens engaged in these organizing processes.

Fourth, in both cases, connections to the state ensured that local citizens were able to gain access to resources that enhanced their organizing processes. The creation and maintenance of relationships and connections to local citizens from the state may be a way to catalyze greater innovativeness in community organizing processes.

Finally, the difference between Clearfield and Titusville was a matter of approach. From the beginning, in the Titusville case, there was an intentional effort to gather support from a wide variety of types of people, even those that were not previously connected to organizing efforts in the community. However, in the Clearfield case, a great emphasis was on positional leaders within the community, especially those that had access to significant financial resources. By limiting the types of people within Clearfield, I believe that this is likely why they struggled in the first stages of their organizing process. Had they been more intentional to include individuals from a wider representation of the community, they would have likely been more successful in their idea creation phase as well as had less issues moving into the implementation phase.

**Cross-State Analysis**

By comparing the cases across the two states, I note several similarities and differences. First, in both states, the state’s overall economic welfare affected the economic health of the local communities. This linkage is important to note, because
local success may be directly linked to the state’s economic output. Therefore, state attention to economic policy and development is necessary to improve possible economic opportunities in local communities. The state needs to be mindful of supporting and encouraging local business development, while also attracting business and industry from outside the state.

Second, the implementation of the Main Street program differed in approach in each state. In Michigan, the two towns studied used municipal support mechanisms to institute the program. In Pennsylvania, the communities formed nonprofit organizations.

Existing Michigan tax law enabled the use of a special municipal tax to fund local community organizing efforts in the downtown and establishment of an authority, the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The DDAs were able to institute the Main Street program in the Michigan case studies, and did not require reallocating funding from municipal government.

In Pennsylvania, no such tax structure exists, limiting the municipal government’s ability to fund the Main Street program. State legislation on tax structures impacted the way community organizing processes were able to implement their ideas in their communities, specifically affecting the Main Street program. This is an important consideration when creating legislation at the state level. Decisions about municipal tax structures result in unintended outcomes associated with the implementation of programs and initiatives at the local level. In Pennsylvania, local citizens were required to perform much more work to implement their community organizing processes than in Michigan. This was largely due to the lack of municipal support structures available in Pennsylvania, such as tax funding and an authority to house the program. State legislation
therefore has the potential to directly impact the implementation of the final plans and projects of local community organizing processes.

Third, in both states, connections to individuals working at the state level in agencies and organizations provided access to resources for the local communities. These connections provided the information necessary to implement a specific program in the communities. Developing linkages between the state and a diverse group of local citizens, including governmental officials and leaders in nonprofit agencies, is a key aspect of providing support to local community organizing processes, and has the potential to increase the innovativeness of these processes by increasing their access to additional, extra-local knowledge and assets. These connections may often be serendipitous, but if the state is interested in enabling local innovation in community organizing, these connections require intentional facilitation. Therefore, funding for outreach and engagement is necessary when developing policies and programs at the state level.

Finally, of note is that geographic location and time of application to the Main Street Program did not seem to greatly impact the overall community organizing processes. Across both states, all communities followed the same general flow as the innovation conceptual framework. Additionally, each state had one community that was part of the original applicants to the Main Street program as well as one community that was a more recent applicant to the Main Street Program. In Portland, one of the original Main Street communities in that State, they did struggle at first due to the application procedures at the time. However, they did help to inform the state program, and were able to provide input into how the state-level program was implemented so that it better served communities.
Cross-Case Analysis

By comparing all four cases, I note several important points for individuals that seek to develop an innovative process for community organizing, as well as innovative ideas for tackling issues in their communities. First, while there are often similarities in local community organizing processes, these processes nevertheless differ from place to place. Each community followed the general trajectory of my original innovation framework, moving from recognition of need, to idea formation, and finally to implementation. However, each community had its own way of moving through these general phases. There were several differences in the community organizing process, including length of the process; Blissfield and Titusville, took longer to move through the community organizing process, while Clearfield and Portland pushed faster to achieve their outcomes. Residents of the community initiated the processes in Blissfield and Clearfield. In Portland and Titusville people facilitated the processes as part of their job responsibilities. Another difference is that each community’s process created unique ideas and ways to implement their ideas that were specific to their community.

These differences provide evidence that community organizing may be best understood by using a general framework that incorporates the flexibility for individual communities to craft their processes according to the context of their situation. It may be useful to utilize the innovation conceptual framework as a way to guide an organizing process in a community, while intentionally facilitating interaction with and input from the broader community throughout. If issues do arise, it is important to take pause, reflect upon where the community is in the process, and explore where adjustment may need to occur. That may mean involving more members from the community to be more
representative of the social fields in the community. It could also mean moving back into a previous stage of a framework, revisiting the task at hand, before moving forward and focusing only on the outcome.

Because community organizing tends to be voluntary, it is not as easy as instituting a process in a business setting where, for example, a new process may be mandated. In a community process, connections must be created, and people must see the benefit in being part of the effort to volunteer their time. In each case study, the specific reasons people engaged in their community’s organizing process were different, and included, for example, interest in their own business’s success, job responsibilities, individual assets and capabilities they believed would be of use to the process. However, these were usually coupled with a general love for the community and a deep rooted desire for their home community to improve. When speaking about the reason for being involved, one interview participant indicated,

“That’s how you change the world, and at the end of the day, you change the world one person at a time, even if you are in a small community. You never know how far that’s going to go in the world and in life. I think that if you can get to the end of your own lifetime, and be able to look back and say you were able to be a part of something like that, it’s not just about you, it’s about something much bigger.”

These feelings kept people dedicated to the process, even when they were spending significant hours on an application, receiving no compensation, and the final outcome was uncertain.
Second, while the community processes did follow a general framework, the **community organizing processes were not linear**. In Blissfield, there were multiple implementation processes occurring at once, all originating from Sarah’s initial process, while the individuals in the combined process continued the development of the Main Street application. Additionally, these implementation processes frequently spurred both recognition of greater need and more idea generation. As anticipated in the review of the innovation literature (Freeman, 2008), the community organizing processes are therefore spiral in nature, spurring additional processes to occur.

A process may also have multiple stages operating at once. In both Blissfield and Clearfield, multiple implementation phases occurred at the same time as idea formation. This may require individuals involved in organizing processes to prioritize ideas and needs according to the assets available for implementation, or it may cause some ideas to not be implemented fully (as was the case in Clearfield). Additionally, this nonlinearity will also require more volunteers from across the community, in order to ensure that one group will not get burnt out working on multiple phases at once. The prioritization should come from the organizing group, finding ways to ensure that the decision is a group decision, rather than one chosen by an elite few or simply the facilitator. Doing so will help build trust that this is truly a community owned process, rather than one being forced upon on the community.

Third, **the impetus to begin the community organizing process was a combination of external influences and internal assets and motivations of the individual(s) who initiated it**. In Blissfield, Sarah’s brother-in-law’s comment about Blissfield being a dying town sparked her passion to act. Similarly, comments from the
business community in Blissfield pushed Mark to begin a process with the municipal government. In both Portland and Titusville, the job responsibilities of both Jeremy and Susan allowed them to see the potential associated with their town.

Finally, in Clearfield, the prospect of natural gas development led Donovan to take a proactive approach, using this as an opportunity to develop a new vision for the future of the borough. However, at the same time, what enabled Sarah and Donovan to want to act was attachment to their community. This value for contributing to a vibrant place to live to meet the needs of citizens across the community motivated these individuals to act and to remain dedicated to the organizing process.

Additionally, in the cases of Portland and Titusville, both Susan and Jeremy were new to the community organizing efforts; this enabled them to see what was occurring in the community in different ways. They initiated action, and then facilitated the process to find solutions. Their individual assets and worldview allowed them to move forward with a community organizing process. While motivations to act could be either negative or positive, the case studies suggest that both external and internal pressure to act in a community setting may be influential in the initiation of community organizing processes.

Fourth, the strength of ties was activated in different ways throughout the processes. When and how people utilized or formed social ties during the organizing processes differed according to phases. In the beginning of an organizing process, strong ties were activated in order for people to feel supported in their ideas and to gain feedback about their ideas. Strong ties were activated in the recognition phase in all but one case, Portland. In Portland, Jeremy’s emphasis was on creating numerous new
connections at the beginning, likely due to his being a new member in the community. If Jeremy had developed stronger ties and received feedback from these trusted people before he made public statements to a larger audience, he may have avoided offending several groups during the idea formation phase.

Weak ties were very active in the idea formation phase. In Blissfield, the small initial group helped identify other people, with whom they were more weakly tied, who had assets to contribute. This use of weaker ties ensured greater access to information and human capacities. In all four cases, weak ties allowed for access to external information during the idea formation phase. In contrast, strong ties were more active in all four communities to move to the implementation phase. These strong ties were among a group of people that created the application to the Main Street program. Simultaneously, there was also a need for weak ties in the implementation phase, to ensure broader community support and access to external resources.

As anticipated by the review of the literature, I conclude that strong ties are more active in the need recognition phase, weak ties are more active during the idea formation phase, and both are active during the implementation phase.

Fifth, the finding in the literature regarding protection of the organizing group from the greater system that may be resistant to change (Berkun, 2007) proved to be important in different phases for these four communities. In Blissfield, Sarah provided protection for the group in the idea formation phase, by utilizing her connections to the municipal government. The municipal government was aware of the group, but she facilitated her group outside of a municipal structure that was viewed as ineffective. Additionally, she provided a safe space to entertain all ideas that members
were interested in pursuing. However, this emphasis on creating a close-knit group without wider communication to and feedback from the community likely contributed to the rumors about secret group meetings.

In Portland, the group only pursued the Main Street program; there was no facilitation in a safe space to explore multiple ideas in the process. In Clearfield, the protection came in the implementation phase through Shelby’s efforts to negotiate between several groups, while creating trust within the group engaged in creating the Clearfield Revitalization Corporation and the New Communities Main Street application. In Titusville, Susan and the Chamber board created a safe space in the beginning of the idea formation phase. This allowed Susan to develop support for the idea of a Main Street application with the Chamber, before the Chamber sought wider community support.

The creation of a safe, protected space during the organizing process developed trust within the Blissfield, Clearfield, and Titusville processes, which ended up being critical to the processes. In Portland, however, that trust was eroded over time, except among the small group of people that eventually crafted the Main Street application. The wider community did not trust this group, which affected support for the Main Street program and application. Therefore, while the protection of those involved in the organizing process from external pressures may differ from community to community, I conclude that doing so developed trust that was necessary to support these community organizing efforts. This is not to indicate that the process needs to be insular or exclusive, rather during the facilitation of the process, the organizing group needs to feel as though they can entertain any idea rather than be limited by external pressures that may say “no.” Additionally, great care is needed to ensure that there is communication
more broadly to the community, allowing for feedback throughout the process to increase transparency and trust with the process.

Sixth, **access to both local and external knowledge was key** in all four processes. In Blissfield, for instance, Sarah’s knowledge of the local community council allowed her group to create ideas and implement them without penalty. In all four cases, knowledge of how municipal governance worked, and familiarity with ordinances and governmental agency procedures, enabled the successful implementation of the Main Street program. Familiarity with the local context allowed for groups to develop innovative ideas to address the recognized needs in their communities. Additionally, access to external knowledge about how the Main Street program worked, funding opportunities and other resources ensured the proper navigation of state and federal systems. Knowledge, both local and external, is a key component in community organizing processes and in ensuring innovative ideas within them.

Seventh, **sometimes communities need to slow their processes down.** Both Blissfield’s and Titusville’s processes took a long time, and citizens carefully considered their actions before moving forward. Blissfield deliberately took an extra year before making application to become a full Main Street certified community. Portland and Clearfield, by contrast, moved through the application process very quickly, and received little feedback from the wider community. In Portland, this caused resistance in the implementation phase. In Clearfield, organizers moved the community visioning process too quickly, receiving little public feedback on the vision articulated, which may have resulted in less success for the Main Street effort than in their other implementation processes that were occurring simultaneously.
Even though Blissfield focused only on the application for the Main Street program, volunteers became disenfranchised when the emphasis became only on the application rather than on actually implementing their ideas in the community. If organizers had slowed the process down, and allowed for public input and feedback, additional ties may have been fostered and developed throughout the community organizing process. At times, the emphasis became less on the community than on the outcome of the process (e.g., submitting the application). Taking steps to build in reflection and ensure opportunities for broad participation may have prevented this.

Finally, when examining the structure of the process, the Blissfield and Titusville communities emphasized connections across the entire community, strengthening the community social field. Clearfield and Portland put greater emphasis on including people from a more exclusive and narrowly focused group. In Portland the emphasis remained only on the business owners and property owners in the town. In Clearfield, the emphasis was on people who had a large amount of power in their organizations, although these organizations were not necessarily fully representative of residents in the community.

Blissfield did seek out wide representation, but organizers also relied heavily on their own existing strong ties and weak ties to invite individuals to participate in the process. In Titusville, representation came from across the entire community, and from multiple social fields; organizers established new relationships and connections as well. If Clearfield, Portland, and Blissfield had facilitated more relationships from individuals with a broader set of interests, as Titusville did, those communities may not have faced as many challenges in their community organizing processes. They could also have
increased their potential for the creation of even more innovative ideas and greater strengthening of the community field. This is time-consuming to do, requires intentional facilitation and effort, and may require healing rifts from previous organizing efforts or other conflicts that exist in the narrative of the community. The benefit of doing so increases the opportunity for innovation in approach to community organizing by creating new connections across the community. Additionally, within those processes, it creates new connections across areas of specialty, interests, and perspective, known to increase the potential for increasing innovative ideas (Johansson, 2006) that may be helpful in addressing issues in the community.
Chapter 7

Concluding Remarks
I began this research project with the goal of identifying ways to positively impact rural communities seeking new ideas to address their local needs. It is my hope that through the application of the findings this research impacts practice, policy, and theory. This dissertation addressed two objectives. The first objective was to document rural community organizing processes for community development, and compare them to an innovation process conceptual framework. This is because when we think about community development, we emphasize plurality in our organizing efforts, but rarely is this plurality linked to innovation. Innovation is inherently linked to the connection across difference (Burt, 2004; Johnsson, 2006). Connecting across difference is explicit in the formation of the Community Field (Wilkinson, 1999). Exploring community development as a process of innovation, therefore helps to frame community development and community organizing in a new way. The second objective was to identify and analyze the use of social networks in these community organizing processes. Doing so provides suggestions for potential modifications to these networks for catalyzing innovative ideas to address community-identified issues. Achieving these objectives required that I examine the intersection of two literatures: community and innovation.

In the context of this research, the concept of community emphasizes locale, human interaction, and collective action to meet local resident needs. Using the frame of social field theory, I view a community to be a collection of connected groups of individuals interacting according to specific interests, or social fields, within a particular locale (Wilkinson, 1999). These social fields exist at the community-level. There is a specialized social field, the community field, which encompasses individuals interacting
with the purpose for enacting positive outcomes to meet the needs of residents across the entire community (Wilkinson, 1999). The community field is composed of individuals engaging in activities that aim to benefit the entire community, referred to as community organizing processes in this research. The community field is not just one specific interest group.

Innovation refers to the creation and implementation of novel ideas to meet a perceived need (Gaynor, 2002; Kaufman, 2003; Shavinina & Seeratan, 2003). In this situation, the focus was on community-level innovation, or the development of a novel approach to addressing community issues, publicly implemented within the community field through community organizing efforts. To examine ways to understand how innovation can be catalyzed within community organizing processes, I reviewed the relevant literature on innovation, developed a conceptual framework, and situated it within a community context using community field theory. I then used this framework to evaluate four community organizing efforts and identify opportunities for making adjustments within community organizing processes to increase their potential for innovation. Of note is that the community organizing process could be the innovation in the community, essentially a novel way of connecting across the community to address issues in the community.

In the frame of community field theory, the concept of community development takes on a specific form. Community development focuses on developing the community field, purposively developing and strengthening connections between people who are engaging in efforts to positively impact well-being across the entire community (Wilkinson, 1999). The community field should include representation of all social fields
within the community, to ensure that all perspectives are represented and are given an opportunity to contribute (Wilkinson, 1999). However, this theoretical ideal is not always achieved. Not all social fields are necessarily represented within and across community organizing processes. Also, activities within the community field (community organizing processes) are not always connected to each other, creating separate efforts within the community. The goal of community development is therefore to strengthen the community field, to connect all community organizing processes, and to ensure that all social fields have the opportunity to be represented in these processes. In application, this may mean that not all social fields are present, but that their interests and needs are considered. This may mean that a true, theoretically pure community field may never actually exist, but that organizing efforts should continuously strive toward that ideal. Additionally, individuals often participate in more than one social field, and will be able to bring multiple perspectives into community organizing processes.

I examined one community organizing process within each of four rural places. This enabled me to document and analyze people’s interactions and connections (the social networks), related to a specific community organizing process. I use this information to assess what worked well and problems that arose within each process. Comparing experiences across four community organizing processes enabled the identification of opportunities and strategies to increase the potential for innovation.

The communities I studied were selected because their organizing effort was related to entering the Main Street Program. This program is offered nationally through the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and it requires communities to work through an organizing process in order make application to be considered part of the program. I
selected two communities in Michigan, Blissfield and Portland, and two in Pennsylvania, Clearfield and Titusville. I used a multiple case study methodology, conducting key informant interviews and collecting archival data to construct four cases that detailed and chronicled the community organizing processes of these four communities. Of note is that the two variables, geographic location (differing by state) and time of making application to Main Street (first communities or more recent applicants, did not provide noticeable differences on the organizing processes.

I compared the organizing process in these four cases to my community innovation process framework, which involves three key phases: identification of need, idea formation, and implementation. The identification of need phase requires that an individual within a community recognize an issue or potential that affects the entire community and must be addressed (Van de Ven, as cited in Gaynor, 2002). Once the need is recognized, the individual begins to act by connecting with others within the community to receive feedback and gain support to address the issue, likely friends and family whom he or she is strongly connected to within his or her social network (Lester & Piore, 2004).

The community organizing process begins with the recognition of need phase. After receiving positive feedback indicating a confirmation of the need for change from these interactions, the individual will encourage the group to move into the idea formation phase. At this phase, the group will seek additional information about the recognized need while connecting to other individuals in the community that can provide connections to specific resources to meet this need (Lester & Piore, 2004). These individuals will be a combination of friends (strong ties) and acquaintances (weak ties) of
the initial group of people involved, and ideally should represent social fields from across
the community. During this time, this group will begin to develop creative ideas to
address the perceived need, entertaining and considering all ideas presented (Berkun,
2007; Gaynor, 2002; Lester & Piore, 2004; O’Connor, 2003; Price, 2005).

Over time, this group will expand and gain greater input from across the
community and connect to resources external to the community through the use of the
strong and weak ties of those involved in the organizing efforts. The creation of new
connections may be required to ensure all social fields are represented within the
community (Wilkinson, 1999). During the final phase, implementation, individuals
involved in the idea formation phase, plus others, will begin to create a plan to apply the
idea in the community. This group will need to continue to communicate the plan and
ideas to the broader community. They should solicit feedback and new volunteers, and
use the feedback and new connections to gain access to resources necessary to implement
the idea. To accomplish the successful implementation of the idea will require the group
to utilize their weak ties across the community to ensure broad participation, and support
and resources for and adoption of their ideas and plan (Granovetter, 1973; Wejnert,
2002; Rogers, 2003).

Implications for Practice

I believe this dissertation has several implications for practice that may help both
community members and community development professionals interested in increasing
the innovativeness of their community organizing efforts.
Involvement Across the Community is Essential

Calls for involvement from a wide variety of people within community organizing efforts are not new. Within community field theory, for example, participation from across the community is an essential tenet (Christenson & Robinson, 1980; Flora, Flora, & Fey, 2004; Hustedde, 2009; Wilkinson, 1999). This research helps provide increased support for the importance of broad-based participation for successful organizing efforts, indicating that diversifying connections across the community in organizing efforts has the potential for increasing the innovativeness within community organizing efforts. Including individuals across areas of specialty, access to assets, or diverse perspectives can provide new insight into the issue at hand, and it has the potential to lead to more innovative outcomes (Burt, 2004; Johansson, 2006).

When trying to solve a specific issue in a community, such as an economic downturn, there is a common tendency to focus on gathering individuals with direct experience with the issue – in this case, for example, business owners, representatives of economic organizations, and local government officials or staff. While the perspectives of these individuals are important, the potential for innovative solutions will likely occur by involving people that represent a wide variety of different experiences, areas of knowledge, and contexts. This may allow for a new framing and perspective on the issue, leading to new, creative ideas on how to address it.

The intersection of difference was a key component to the organizing processes in most of the communities in this research, allowing the residents to connect in new ways that were not previously utilized to address issues in the community. This included finding new ways to organize in their community (in all except Portland). It also allowed
for innovative ideas to be presented, as was the case in Blissfield, noted by three interview participants, that bringing together a wide array of individuals allowed for much more innovative solutions to tackle the issues they identified.

Accomplishing this may require developing new connections within a community, and reaching out to others who may not have been connected to organizing efforts in the past. Riots between people in the community may also need to be addressed. The divisions between people could range from the slighting of a family member to discrimination against a particular group by local government officials. In communities, organizers must address divisions and bad feelings created through history or previous processes before it is possible to connect across the community. Remaining mindful of this is difficult, and healing long-standing feuds between groups in a community is not easy. It may slow a community organizing process down, but re-establishing and fostering these connections will benefit the current effort by increasing those who willingly provide input and support and it may help future efforts by reducing the time and effort needed to address rifts in the community. Additionally, these connections may help increase the access to future resources and individual capacities.

**Consider All Ideas**

When connecting across the community and across multiple areas of experience, knowledge, and contexts, it is essential to develop a trusting environment as one way to encourage creativity. One way to do this is to truly consider all ideas for addressing an identified issue. In community organizing processes, a culture that encourages creativity, no matter how outlandish the ideas may sound, may generate a new approach to
addressing the issue of interest. Facilitation of this culture requires that individuals not become so focused on one idea that other ideas are not entertained. This willingness to entertain all ideas may also encourage people to speak up more willingly, knowing their ideas will be treated with respect. The people involved in the organizing efforts may need to be provided with skills to respond to naysayers or from those residents resistant to change and risk-taking. This is not to indicate that different views, including no action, should be discouraged; rather, discussions of differences should be respectful, and should honor the possibilities of all ideas to address an issue.

**Utilize Both Internal and External Assets**

When communities face problems, there may often be a sense among residents that the community can take care of itself. Communities may insulate themselves, using only their internal assets to address problems (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004; Hustedde, 2009). Community organizing efforts can increase the potential for innovation by connecting to external resources and perspectives. Local resources can be enhanced with the creation or maintenance of connections to external sources of information, financial support or other contributions, in order to accomplish the goals identified by community members.

When external individuals connect to a community, especially if individuals outside the community are the ones to initiate contact, they must respect, recognize, and cooperate with local individuals within community organizing efforts. External individuals should share relevant information and alternate perspectives, but encourage and enable local residents to take on responsibility and leadership within community organizing processes. If not, they may be seen as outsiders trying to change the
community. Residents may become skeptical or resistant to the participation of some external individuals, and no longer participate themselves. If the process would become driven by external individuals it no longer is a community organizing process.

**Community Organizing Requires Commitment to Community**

It may take a long time to accomplish the intended outcomes of community organizing efforts. It takes time, patience, and perseverance to communicate with individuals/groups across a community and to allow time for meaningful exchange of ideas and broad input to these community processes and decisions. These efforts require the commitment to make a positive difference for all members of the community. Community organizing is not easy work, and most of the time those involved receive no remuneration. Success therefore requires a strong commitment amongst a core group of people who have a sense of responsibility for and interest in their community. Open and respectful communication and relationships between these individuals are essential for sharing information, developing innovative ideas, and implementing solutions. These relationships may have to be intentionally facilitated and consciously developed within the community organizing process. This is not the responsibility solely of the individual(s) facilitating the organizing process, but all individuals involved need to have some responsibility for keeping relationships open and respectful.

While this core group may be a driving force within the community organizing process, it is essential that the group remain fluid. New individuals must be encouraged to participate and welcomed to the process, so that new ideas and resources become available and leadership can shift so that some can step back from the process, according
to their personal situation. This will ensure that the effort is not disrupted, and new perspectives continue to enhance the community organizing process.

**Communicate Activities Broadly**

During a community organizing effort, the focus may be on forming ideas, finding assets to carry out the ideas, or implementing the ideas in the community. This focus, whatever it may be, may actually distract people from effectively communicating the activities of the community organizing effort to the entire community. A comprehensive communication and feedback plan is as essential to innovation in community organizing as the formation of creative ideas and connecting individuals to the organizing efforts. This communication ensures transparency of decision making to the broader community, provides opportunities for more people to participate and offer input into the community organizing process, and has the potential to develop broader awareness and acceptance of the ideas being presented. Although awareness may also increase resistance in the community, an open process helps to develop relationships among individuals across various groups in the community, and increases support for the proposed plan or effort.

**Emphasize Process Over Outcome**

During community organizing processes, it is typical for organizers to focus on what they hope to accomplish, such as the filling of storefronts with businesses. When there is an over-emphasis on that outcome, however, organizers may rush their processes to accomplish the outcome. In this research, individuals at times became so focused on
the goal of becoming part of the Main Street Program that entertaining other ideas became irrelevant. This may lead to less input from the broader community, less consideration of ideas, and less communication of activities. It may also affect the development of connections within and across organizing efforts, which are essential components in increasing the potential for innovation in community organizing.

The organizing efforts in Portland and, initially, in Clearfield in these case studies focused on making connections in the business community because a large component of the Main Street Program focuses on the downtown business district. Community members connected to the organizing effort neglected the participation of those in the community that were not connected to local businesses. Had they taken time to be more intentional and facilitated connections across a broader group of people, additional innovative ideas for their organizing efforts may have resulted. In order to emphasize process and communication over outcome, organizers may need to circle back or revisit earlier stages, reconsider ideas multiple times before they are implemented, or intentionally consider which ‘others’ need to be involved. This will likely add more time to the process. However, doing so will decrease the potential for negative, unintended consequences.

**Manage Expectations**

Creative ideas often are encouraged in community organizing processes, to increase the potential for innovation. However, it is important to be clear that what is finally implemented will be based on agreement of those involved in the process, after receiving input from the community more broadly. It also is important to assess the
feasibility of proposed changes and communicate these to community members. If organizing efforts continually promise, for instance, to bring in large manufacturing firms, or to fill every downtown storefront, without delivering on these outcomes, residents of a community may experience distrust or hopelessness. This does not mean that ambitious visions or lofty goals should be discouraged. Instead, those involved in the process should identify the goals and the varying levels of investment required and discuss the different chances of being successful early in the process. This gives community members a realistic assessment of success. Knowing when and how to communicate steps of implementation are just as important as communicating about the organizing process.

**Implications for Policy**

In addition to implications for practice, my analysis provides several important considerations for policy development and creation.

**Build Outreach and Engagement into Policy**

Outreach and engagement need to be a critical and vital component of programs and policy at the state level, to ensure local communities are aware of external resources. In fact, establishing connections to local leaders is just as important as the program or policy itself. This may require using existing structures and communication networks, or it may require developing new connections and new ways of communicating to ensure broad exposure to the state-level policy or program. These relationships should also be used to provide feedback to the state level agency. In so doing, this helps to strengthen
the programs and initiatives at the state level, while strengthening relationships with individuals in the local community.

Communication of programs and policies may also require creating the capacity within communities for individuals or organizations to apply for or participate in programs and initiatives. If the goal of policies is to effect change in the local communities, taking time and investing resources in outreach and training is as essential as participation in the program. Emphasizing skill development such as grant writing or community organizing facilitation can increase collective capacity in a community for meeting its needs, while also increasing understanding of how to effectively and successfully interface with external resources.

**Be Mindful of Funding and Implementation Structures**

Successful implementation of state-sponsored programs at the local level requires community funding sources and implementation structures. Programs without a sustainable funding source will struggle to meet local needs. Achieving this may require building capacity or authority in communities to develop new funding structures. Context in this regard is key; those communities that are resistant to taxation may need more creative ways to acquire funding for community organizing efforts rather than an emphasis on fees or local tax increases. Additionally, if a structure for implementation is complicated or overly time intensive, it will inhibit the ability of communities to participate. Finally, the importance of thinking through and analyzing community-level incentives in the design and implementation of state-level, even national-level, policies, regardless of policy domain cannot be overlooked. This may help communities find
rationale for participating in these programs, while also ensuring the state- and national-level legislators and administrators are mindful of local needs and context.

In the two cases in Pennsylvania in this research, interview participants indicated that the requirement to form a non-profit organization in order to house the Main Street initiative was very burdensome. It decreased the willingness of others to be involved due to the personal time required to participate in these efforts. In areas with smaller populations, and/or fewer people to draw upon for organizing efforts, complicated requirements to participate in programs may overburden the community. Flexibility within policy and programs may assist those communities with fewer resources, human and otherwise, to participate.

**Implications for Theory**

This research helps to inform innovation and community theory. Below I present several implications for theory.

**Size of Groups**

The innovation literature has an emphasis on small, core groups in processes to catalyze innovation (Farrell, 2001; Giuffre, 2013). While there is an explicit interest in connecting across difference in these groups (Burt, 2004; Johansson, 2013), there is an interest in keeping this group small to be able to move efforts forward. Likely this is due to the foundation of the innovation literature in the private and business sector, where there is a need to keep groups small so the effort is not too resource intensive. In a community setting, a small group size may not be effective and may inhibit innovation at
the community level. While there is a need for dedicated individuals to take on specific roles to move efforts forward, this does not require that the organizing group be small.

In a community, interaction of multiple individuals across social fields requires a larger group to inform the community organizing process to maximize the perspectives, skills, and capacities for developing innovative ideas and solutions to address community issues. This is not to say that a small group within a community could not be effective. Rather, having a small group would require intentional connection and communication to the broader community to ensure that others do not see this small group as taking control of the community or that the group is exclusive and focusing on personal interests instead of broader community interests.

**Application of Innovation Theory in Community**

Community organizing has the potential to produce innovative ideas to deal with community-identified issues. However, the ways in which community members organize may also be the innovation. In times when residents organize in new, novel ways, activating or creating social connections across the community may be the outcome needed. At times, community members may become discouraged if the idea for addressing an issue is not effectively enacted to make progress to fix the issue. However, the new organizing structure created may have resulted in connections across social fields within the community field that were not previously present. These new lines of communication and resource exchange may enable opportunity for activating these connections to develop additional ideas for addressing a current issue as well as other
issues in the future. Innovation is both the goal of the community organizing process as well as being essential for the success of the community organizing process.

The intersection with the innovation literature helps to inform the community organizing and community development literature by providing a different frame for the purpose of connecting across social fields, inclusiveness in process, and participation of diverse individuals. The application of the innovation literature has more possibilities than the private business, or firm setting. The innovation literature has great potential for contributing to better understanding of the steps or phases in community development processes. Conversely the community literature can help to inform the innovation literature by helping to elucidate the complicated nature of connecting people in the innovation processes. At times, the innovation literature makes the connection of individuals across areas of difference seem easy. However, the complicated nature of human interaction that includes historical narratives of previous divisions between people, personality differences, among others is a central component to the community literature. This may help shed greater insight into how to facilitate innovation processes in the private sector.

**Theory in Context**

Finally, a key point from this research is that theory is often written without reference to or concern for context or application. When applying theory in a particular context, theory doesn’t always work as proposed by the theorist. The real world is much more complicated because theory is, essentially, a model. It cannot capture all of the complexity of the real world. For example, individuals in community organizing efforts
frequently are representing multiple social fields simultaneously. This aspect makes it complicated to understand which social field the individual represents during an organizing effort, and, in reality, that individual may find it necessary to speak on behalf of multiple social fields. Theory also ignores the limitations of human interaction, that, for example, repairing a rift in a community may not be possible. In theory, any connection is possible. However, in reality, psychological and emotional limitations may make these connections impractical or painful.

**Reflections and Future Areas of Research**

Finally, I present four methodological reflections on this research and ideas for future areas of research. First, retroactive social network collection is difficult. I had hoped to gather full social network data associated with the community organizing processes I studied. This proved to be impractical. Participants, for example, would consistently remark that they could remember certain additional people participating, although they could not remember their names. Or they might remember the list of individuals participating, but were unsure when they either became involved in or relinquished their ties to the organizing process. Additionally, participants found it difficult to codify the social fields or groups individuals represented, placing many individuals in an “other” or simply “residents” category. To rectify this issue, a better future method for researching the social networks of community organizing processes may be participant observation. Engaging in research of this nature would require identifying communities about to embark on a community organizing process, being present throughout meetings during the process, and interacting in the community outside
of formal meetings to capture what happens outside of the meetings. Utilizing this method would ensure accurate records of the formation and modification of social networks throughout the process, creating new possibilities for data analysis. From this data analysis, it would be possible to understand more concretely how people connect, with whom they connect, and where they connect (it may likely be outside of formal structures or meetings).

Second, the focus of this research was rural communities. While the findings may be applicable to all communities, additional research is needed on different rural areas of the United States, as well as on urban communities and international communities. Expanding research into these localities will likely provide greater nuance to the outcomes of this research. Connections in these areas are much more complex, dealing with multiple communities within an urban environment, for example. Additionally, the types of networks and how they are activated may be different in international communities, where family units are different, connection across gender may be prohibited, or in other ways that the culture in America enables or provides barriers to connection that may not exist in other areas of the world. Understanding how people connect within these settings will further provide insight into the ways people connect in community organizing processes.

Third, the focus of this research was the analysis of existing community organizing processes. By analyzing these processes within the community innovation framework, I was able to identify opportunities for increasing the potential for maximizing innovative potential. A next step from this research would be to apply this community innovation framework directly to help facilitate a community organizing
process in communities. This application of the theory will test these observations, adding additional insights into the theoretical aspect of this research.

Finally, an incredibly powerful theme throughout the research process is that people really do care about their communities, and they are willing to go through personal strife to enact positive change. This dedication to community is an essential precondition for making change, and enabling the process of innovation. The social nature of this commitment is in line with the social entrepreneurship literature (Dees, 2001). Additional research could provide a more nuanced understanding of the development of this dedication and care, relating back to social entrepreneurship, and could help researchers understand how to foster this in other communities.
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## Appendix A

### Complete Listing of Michigan Main Streets Communities

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*2012 Population Estimates, Census Bureau
Source: American FactFinder, Census Bureau, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml###.
Data downloaded January 20, 2014.

## Appendix B:
Complete Listing of Pennsylvania Main Streets Communities

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*2012 Population Estimates, Census Bureau
Source: American FactFinder, Census Bureau, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml###.
Data downloaded January 20, 2014.

Appendix C: Interview Question Routes

**State Level Main Street Contact Interview Questions**

1. Talk to me about how the Main Street Program was established in (STATE).
2. How did you become involved with the program?
3. How does your office spread the word about Main Street Program?
4. How do communities become involved in the program? Walk me through a new community contacting the office and how they would become part of the program.
5. What would you consider success in a community that is part of the Main Streets Program?
   a. Do you find there are common characteristics of communities that succeed in the program?
6. What types of issues or problems are common with communities when they are organizing to apply to the Main Street Program?
7. Are you familiar with the cities of (City 1) and (City 2) and how they became part of the Main Street program?
   a. First I would like to talk about City 1.
      i. When City 1 became part of the Main Street Program, did you have any concerns about their application? Or were there particular challenges you thought they might face?
      ii. From your perspective how successful has City 1 been in achieving its goals?
   b. Now that we’ve talked about City 1, let’s talk about City 2’s process.
      i. When City 2 became part of the Main Street Program, did you have any concerns about their application? Or were there particular challenges you thought they might face?
      ii. From your perspective how successful has City 2 been in achieving its goals?
8. Could you provide the application materials for City 1 and City 2?
Community Level Main Street Contact Interview Questions

1. Can you give me a bit of history on (CITY)?
2. Can you tell me in your own words what the Main Street Program is?
3. How long has (CITY) been involved with the Main Street program?
4. How did (CITY) become part of the Main Street Program? Can you walk me through the community’s organizing process to apply to the Main Streets Program?
   a. Who were the people who initiated this effort in (CITY)? Who was the initial core group?
   b. Who else was involved in the organizing process before they applied to be part of the Main Street Program?
   c. Do you know if they considered options other than Main Street to achieve their goals? If so, what?
5. How did you become involved in Main Street?
6. What would you consider some of the successes of the program for (CITY)? What about Challenges?
7. Who is helping to maintain the efforts of the Main Street Program? Has this group of people changed over time?
8. How much connection do you have to the State Level program?
   a. Has this changed over time?
   b. What type of support do they provide CITY?
9. Previously you mentioned several individuals who were involved in the community’s process to become part of the Main Street program. Would you provide their names and phone number or email so that I can contact them about talking with me?
10. Do you have documentation from the organizing process that you could share with me?
11. Is there anything else you think I should know about (CITY)’s involvement in Main Streets?
Questions for Citizens involved in Main Street Program Process – Initial Core Group

1. How long have you lived in (CITY)?
   a. Could you tell me a little of the history of (CITY)?
2. (MAIN STREET COMMUNITY CONTACT) indicated to me that you were part of the core group of community members who helped initiate efforts to become part of the Main Streets Program in (CITY), would you say that’s true?
   a. What made you want to make changes here?
3. Let’s talk about how (CITY) became part of the Main Streets Program. Walk me through the community’s process of organizing to apply to the Main Streets program.
   a. Were there other options besides the Main Street program that were considered to meet the goals for (CITY)?
   b. At what point did the community consider being part of the Main Street Program? Why?
      i. Who were you in contact with at the Main Street Program?
   c. What would you say your contributions to the process were?
4. I’m trying to understand who was involved in the organizing process before (CITY) applied to Main Street, and how that group changed throughout the process. **For first interviewee:** First could you list out who was involved in the beginning? **For all subsequent interviewees:** Could you review and add to this list of individuals who were involved in the beginning? (provide a sheet of ruled paper for them to write the names down; as the interviews progress beyond the first initial contact, the interviewee will be provided a list of names that they can add to)
   a. Let’s go through this list. For all but the first interviewee, ask: Do you know this person?
      i. Did you know them before they became involved in the process?
         How and how well?
   b. What was their role in the community?
   c. What groups were they part of?
   d. How were they identified, or did they volunteer?
   e. What was their role in the process?
   f. Were they from the community or outside of the community?
5. **For first interviewee:** Along the way, clearly more people became involved, could you list these individuals out? **All subsequent interviewees:** could you review and add to this list of individuals considered part of the process? (provide a sheet of ruled paper for them to write the names down; as the interviews progress beyond the first initial contact, the interviewee will be provided a list of names that they can add to)
   a. Similar to the last list, let’s go through this list. **For all but the first interviewee, ask:** Do you know this person?
      i. Did you know them before they became involved in the process?
         How and how well?
b. What was their role in the community?

c. What groups were they part of?

d. How were they identified, or did they volunteer?

e. When did they become involved?

f. What was their role in the process?

g. Were they from the community or outside of the community?

6. What would you consider some of the main successes of Main Street here in (CITY)? Challenges?

   a. What contributed to these successes and challenges from your perspective?

7. Previously you mentioned several individuals who were involved in the community’s process to become part of the Main Street program. Would you provide their names and phone number or email so that I can contact them about talking with me?

8. Is there anything else you think I should know about (CITY)’s process to be part of the Main Street program?
Questions for Citizens involved in Main Street Program Process – Involved along the way

1. How long have you lived in (CITY)?
   a. Could you tell me a little of the history of (CITY)?
2. (MAIN STREETS COMMUNITY CONTACT or CORE GROUP CITIZEN) indicated to me that you were part of the group of community members who helped in the community effort for (CITY) to become part of the Main Streets, would you say that’s true?
   a. How did you become involved?
   b. What made you want to make changes here?
3. Let’s talk about how (CITY) became part of the Main Street Program. Walk me through the community’s process of organizing to apply to the Main Streets program.
   a. What would you say your contributions to the process were?
4. I’m trying to understand who was involved in the organizing process before (CITY) applied to Main Street, and how that group changed throughout the process. Could you review and add to this list of individuals who were involved in the beginning? (provide a list of names that they can add to)
   a. Let’s go through this list. Do you know this person?
      i. Did you know them before they became involved in the process?
         How and how well?
   b. What was their role in the community?
   c. What groups were they part of?
   d. How were they identified, or did they volunteer?
   e. What was their role in the process?
   f. Were they from the community or outside of the community?
5. Along the way, clearly more people became involved, could you review and add to this list of individuals considered part of the process? (provide a list of names that they can add to)
   a. Similar to the last list, let’s go through this list. Do you know this person?
      i. Did you know them before they became involved in the process?
         How and how well?
   b. What was their role in the community?
   c. What groups were they part of?
   d. How were they identified, or did they volunteer?
   e. When did they become involved?
   f. What was their role in the process?
   g. Were they from the community or outside of the community?
6. What would you consider some of the main successes of Main Street here in (CITY)? Challenges?
   a. What contributed to these successes and challenges from your perspective?
7. Previously you mentioned several individuals who were involved in the community’s process to become part of the Main Street program. Would you provide their names and phone number or email so that I can contact them about talking with me?

8. Is there anything else you think I should know about (CITY)’s process to be part of the Main Street program?
Appendix D: Consent Form

Research Study on Community-Level Innovation
Spring 2013

You are invited to participate in this research study that will consist of one interview. The purpose of this research study is to document the community organizing process before the community members applied to be part of the Main Street Program. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions. You may discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. The focus of this research study is to understand how community members organize and utilize their social contacts while engaged in community organizing processes. The data collected will be utilized for research and publication purposes.

You will not benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to a greater understanding of community organizing and community development practice. Additionally, there are no known risks associated with participation in this study. The total amount of time associated with your voluntary participation in this study will be approximately a one-hour interview. The total amount of participants in this study will be approximately 60-80.

Your information associated with this study will remain confidential. All information will be stored in a locked and secured file cabinet in the office of Glenn Sterner at The Pennsylvania State University. Your identifying information associated with the interview will be removed by Glenn Sterner, and you will be given a pseudonym. The interview will be recorded by a digital audio recorder, and if you choose to not be recorded you will not be allowed to participate in the research study. The recordings will be transcribed by Glenn Sterner or a professional transcription service, with your identifying information removed from the transcripts. The audio files and transcripts of the interview will remain in the same locked file cabinet in Glenn Sterner’s office. All data will be kept for a minimum of three years until the relevance of the raw data is no longer deemed necessary to keep
by the investigator. The data will only be accessible to Glenn Sterner and his dissertation committee during this time. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

The information will be utilized for publication purposes only. By participating in this study you agree to allow the researchers to utilize any and all data gathered in this study.

If you have any questions regarding the study or if you feel you have been harmed due to the research, please contact the researcher: Glenn Sterner (ges5098@psu.edu, 517-432-0732, or 303 Armsby Building, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802).

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Pennsylvania State University's Human Participant Research Protection Program by Phone: (814) 865-1775, Fax: 814-863-8699, e-mail: ORProtections@psu.edu, or US Postal mail at The 330 Building, Suite 205, University Park, PA 16802.

By signing this agreement, you agree that:

- Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.
- You have the option to not answer any question or participate in any portion of the study for any reason.
- You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time with out consequence.
- The data collected in this study may be utilized for research purposes to understand how community members organize and utilize their social contacts while engaged in community organizing processes.
- The researcher may record audio from the interview, and you are not able to be part of the study if you choose to not be recorded.

____________________________
Participant Name (print)

____________________________
Participant Name (Signature)   Date
GLENN E. STERNER III

EDUCATION
Ph.D., Rural Sociology; The Pennsylvania State University, August 2015
  ▪ Focal Areas: Rural Sociology, Community Development, and Innovation
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  ▪ Connected Learning Specialization via the Liberty Hyde Bailey Scholars Program

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Diane Felmlee, The Pennsylvania State University; August 2012 – January 2014
Department of Sociology

Clare Hinrichs, The Pennsylvania State University; May 2012 – August 2012
Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education

Senior Director
Bailey Scholars Program, Michigan State University; August 2006 – August 2010

PUBLICATIONS


UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND ADVISING EXPERIENCE
CED 417: Power, Conflict, and Community Decision Making
SOC 597D: Social Networks: Perspective and Method
CEDEV 500: Community and Economic Development: Theory and Practice
CED 496: Community of Practice; Co-Developed and Teacher’s Assistant
CEDEV 560: Regional Development: Principles, Policy, and Practice
CED 375H: Community, Knowledge, and Democracy