

Ripple Effect Mapping: A “Radiant” Way to Capture Effects of Community Programs

University of Idaho
Extension

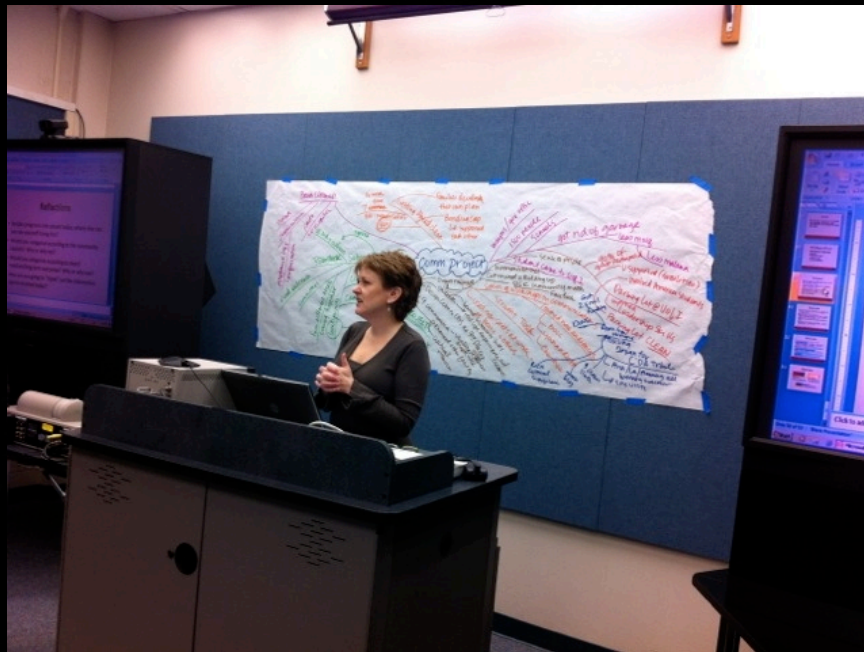


Photo: Debra Hansen, Washington State University Extension, conducting REM training at University of Idaho, March, 2012

Purpose of Ripple Effects Mapping

The impact of community development work is notoriously difficult to measure. Community development programs (like Horizons) often plant seeds that take time to grow into community projects and desired outcomes. By the time something “happens” (a grant is received or a community center is built) the path between the program and the outcome isn’t obvious, even though the grant or community center started with the program. Though clearly the community members writing the grants and building the center deserve all the credit for their hard work, community, state and national non-profits and organizations making those initial investments need to show funders the impact of those investments. Ripple Effects Mapping is a way to do that. In this case we are interested in the impacts of the Horizons program in southern Idaho

Procedure

A group of key individuals that participated in the Horizons program is invited. This group can include people who were involved in the beginning and stayed with it or dropped out. It can also include people who got involved later, or people who were more or less observers from the sidelines: local reporters, city or county government, agencies..... We are looking for a group of 8 – 15 people to come to a two hour session (can be up to 20 but not less than 8). Incentives will be provided and what those incentives are (gas cards versus a catered meal and prizes) is up to the host community/Horizons group.

The first activity is interviews where participants pair off and describe things that happened as a result of the Horizons program (guiding questions will be provided). After the interviews, things that happened are “mapped” on butcher paper on the wall. Mapping continues until the group is satisfied that the map captures everything known to have happened as a result of the program (from improved relationships to million dollar grants and everything in between!).

The messy hand-drawn map will be transferred to a software program and results will be organized in various ways for the community’s and Extension’s use (we want the community to have a useful product from this exercise too!). The resulting products can be distributed electronically and / or we can schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss/explain the results to the community. A presentation can be incorporated into other regularly scheduled meetings to make this part convenient for the community.

Summary

This process originated in Washington, North Dakota and Idaho, where Extension organizations delivering Horizons programs mapped impacts with communities. In all cases, communities participating in the mapping process found the process itself to be rewarding. It is a way to visually show all that has been accomplished, making people feel more positive about their work and is a way to analyze accomplishments and recognize work that still needs to be done. The resulting products and materials can be used in grant proposals and presentations, facilitating communication to the community and decision makers. It is an easy tool to use and with free mapping software programs out there, Ripple Effects Mapping can be used to both evaluate and plan many community programs and projects!