

20 Clues to Rural Community Survival

The following is a list of 20 characteristics found among thriving communities, based on research conducted by the Heartland Center for Leadership Development. The Heartland Center found that thriving communities tend to possess a variety of these characteristics, but not all 20 characteristics. Review these characteristics. Based on your community, rate each characteristic as a strength (+), a weakness (-), or as neutral (/).

Community Strengths and Weaknesses

1.	Evidence of community pride	+	-	/
2.	Emphasis on quality in business and community life	+	-	/
3.	Willingness to invest in the future	+	-	/
4.	Participatory approach to community decision-making	+	-	/
5.	Cooperative community spirit	+	-	/
6.	Realistic appraisal of future opportunities	+	-	/
7.	Awareness of competitive positioning	+	-	/
8.	Knowledge of the physical environment	+	-	/
9.	Active economic development program	+	-	/
10.	Deliberate transition of power to a younger generation of leaders	+	-	/
11.	Acceptance of women in leadership roles	+	-	/
12.	Strong belief in and support of education	+	-	/
13.	Problem-solving approach to providing health care	+	-	/
14.	Strong multi-generational family orientation	+	-	/
15.	Strong presence of traditional institutions that are integral to community life	+	-	/
16.	Sound and well-maintained infrastructure	+	-	/
17.	Careful use of fiscal resources	+	-	/
18.	Sophisticated use of information resources	+	-	/
19.	Willingness to seek help from the outside	+	-	/
20.	Conviction that, in the long run, you have to do it yourself	+	-	/

Using Tool 1 to Assess Readiness

A good way to use this tool is to bring together a diverse group of community citizens, including entrepreneurs, and have them complete the survey. Tabulate the results for the group so that you can identify areas where there is strong agreement about strengths and weaknesses, as well as those areas where some group within the community feels very strongly about certain characteristics. Alternatively, you can use this tool in several settings to get the perspectives of different groups within the community. For example, you might get the perspective of teachers by using the survey in a high school staff meeting or the perspective of local business leaders by using the survey at a chamber meeting.

Below, the Clues have been organized into six broad categories or capacities. By transferring the ratings from your survey work, you can begin to develop a broader picture of your community's strengths and weaknesses. From these findings, you can determine what strengths to accentuate and those weaknesses that require further targeting and development.

Capacity	Characteristics	Rating
<i>Strong Local Economy</i>	2. Emphasis on quality in business and community life	
	7. Awareness of competitive positioning	
	9. Active economic development program	
	17. Careful use of fiscal resources	
<i>Natural Resources/ Infrastructure</i>	8. Knowledge of the physical environment	
	16. Sound and well-maintained infrastructure	
	18. Sophisticated use of information resources	
<i>Identity and Image</i>	1. Evidence of community pride	
	5. Cooperative community spirit	
	20. Conviction that, in the long run, you have to do it yourself	
<i>Shared Leadership</i>	4. Participatory approach to community decision-making	
	10. Deliberate transition of power to a younger generation of leaders	
	11. Acceptance of women in leadership roles	
<i>Support Systems</i>	12. Strong belief in and support of education	
	13. Problem-solving approach to providing health care	
	14. Strong multi-generational family orientation	
	15. Strong presence of traditional institutions that are integral to community life	
<i>Strategic Agenda</i>	3. Willingness to invest in the future	
	6. Realistic appraisal of future opportunities	
	19. Willingness to seek help from the outside	