



The Blandin Community Leadership Program and the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program alumni survey

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Summary

The Blandin Foundation operates the Blandin Community Leadership Program and the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program. Together these are considered the Foundation's core leadership programs. Selected participants represent the diversity of the community, from a variety of professions, backgrounds, and current positions of responsibility. Instruction is based on specific principles of community leadership, using a curriculum designed by the foundation and developed incrementally over time.

Since 1985, the Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP) has provided intensive leadership training to over 5,331 emerging and established community leaders from 380 communities throughout rural Minnesota. Training is done in cohorts of approximately 24 individuals from a single community or cluster of nearby communities. Since 2001, the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program (BRCLP) has strived to develop and sustain healthy reservation communities by building on community strengths. Members of a BRCLP cohort may be from any of the reservations in the state.

The Blandin Foundation contracted with Wilder Research in April of 2009 to conduct a statewide survey of Leadership Program alumni from 28 cohorts trained in three years (2002, 2004 and 2007). This report presents the results of 235 questionnaires completed in May and June of 2009.

Survey results

Characteristics of responding alumni

Demographic information was collected from alumni, including age group, gender, race, and the name of the community in which they live.

- Statewide, the largest number of respondents were in the 45-54 age group (40%), followed by the 55-64 group (26%).
- Approximately half (51%) of the respondents were male and half (49%) were female. The distribution was similar within each year.
- Statewide, 87 percent of the respondents were White; 10 percent were American Indian/Alaskan Native; and 1 percent were Hispanic or Latino.

Engagement in leadership activities

The BCLP and BRCLP help rural leaders to develop and enhance the skills needed to build and sustain healthy communities. Responses to questions about engagement in specific leadership activities before and after training provide us with a better understanding of several aspects of the training programs. Key findings suggest that:

- Leadership activities that involve engaging and involving other community members are the types of leadership practices in which alumni showed the greatest change from before to after training.
- The percentage of alumni who reported *using a variety of ways to frame and address community opportunities and challenges* often or very often before training was 17 percent, compared to 69 percent after training.
- Additionally, 26 percent of alumni reported *identification and knowledge of the key assets in their community* as a leadership activity that they engaged in often or very often before training, vs. 76 percent after training.
- Similar to the rankings of the skills that increased the most in use following training, and those most strengthened by training, when alumni were asked to name the “most important” skills, the top four are all skills involving others in the community, with the more individual skills ranked after those.

Alumni understanding of the theory of change

The Blandin leadership team was interested to know about their alumni’s understanding and knowledge of the Foundation’s theory of change, which has been part of the curriculum since 2003 as three “core competencies.” Questions focused on how alumni are using these competencies in the work they do in their communities, and whether they find them effective. For each of the competencies, respondents were given a brief definition of the term, and asked if they use it in their community work, and whether or not they find it effective. They were also asked to provide an example of *how* they have used it in their community.

- **Framing:** a majority of respondents from all years reported using framing in their community work “some” or “a lot,” with fewer in the 2002 cohorts (73%) and more in the 2004 and 2007 cohorts (93% and 94%, respectively).
- **Building social capital:** respondents in the 2002 cohort (which did not receive the theory of change curriculum) and those in the 2004 cohort were approximately equal in the proportions (85% and 88%) who reported using the skill of building social capital in their communities “some” or “a lot.”

- **Mobilization:** a significantly smaller proportion of respondents reported “Yes, some” or “Yes, a lot” than for the other two categories. For example, 68 percent and 74 percent of alumni from 2004 and 2007, respectively, report using mobilization, and even fewer from 2002.

There is evidence that the core competencies are in use. All three are used by a majority of respondents in all years, and the proportion is higher in the years after the curriculum incorporated the theory. Moreover, nearly all respondents who use each element report that they find it effective in their community work.

Impact on the community

In order to assess the potential impact that cohorts of leaders have on their communities, we analyzed alumni responses based on where they reported they have focused their efforts. While the format of this survey, with mainly closed-ended questions, is not the preferred method to discern this more in-depth kind of impact, we are able to illuminate areas where we might expect to change to most likely to occur. The following are key findings on community impact:

- Three-quarters of respondents (77%) reported that the BCLP/BRCLP training for their cohort has resulted in broad community impact or change.
- Well over half (60%) of respondents reported that their position in the community has changed since they participated in the training. Nearly two-thirds of this group (65%) report that the training contributed significantly to their attaining their new positions.
- The 2007 cohorts report higher percentages of alumni who believe that each of the Foundation’s six strategic priorities has been impacted or greatly impacted by their cohort as a result of training.

Sustained engagement with the Blandin Foundation

Respondents were asked to describe which continuing involvement or supports they and their communities have received from the Blandin Foundation since their participation in the BCLP or BRCLP:

- The majority of respondents most often cited the Community Leader Newsletter (72% of cases) as the main source of their continued involvement with the Foundation.
- Eleven percent of respondents reported that their cohort had received a Quick Start grant, and 20 percent of individuals reported receiving another type of Blandin grant.

In order to ascertain whether or not engagement with the Foundation might change over time, analysis was done by year of participation in BCLP/BRCLP. Results show a picture of sustained engagement, illustrated by the substantial minority of 2004 and 2002 alumni who report involvement in follow-up workshops and Blandin-sponsored activities. The majority of alumni found the continuing involvement that they received either somewhat helpful or very helpful.

Alumni also had the opportunity to describe the kinds of continuing involvement they would find most useful in their work as community leaders. The following were the needs most often mentioned in their open-ended responses:

- Follow-up training and workshops (26% of all respondents)
- Help to organize alumni reunions (particularly if more than one cohort has gone through in a particular community) (18%)
- Grant money (9%)
- Help mobilizing the community (6%)

Conclusions and issues to consider

There is strong evidence from this survey that Blandin Community Leadership Program and Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program training have strengthened participants' skills in ways that have stayed with them, and that alumni are practicing those skills in their communities. The "core competencies" of the theory of change are being used by most survey respondents, and the extent of their use is strongly related to the extent of community impact.

Although majorities of each cohort report using each of the three core competencies, building social capital and framing are used by significantly more respondents than mobilization, which respondents find a more challenging concept to give examples for, and a more difficult skill to apply.

Although training is conducted in cohorts, it is not expected that entire cohorts will continue to function as teams upon completion of training. Rather, collective action is expected around areas of interest selected by Going Forward Teams (the 2002 cohorts did not form Going Forward Teams). Further, rosters of all BCLP alumni in their community are shared with the current cohort and leaders are encouraged to contact other alumni. The evidence gained from this survey indicates that alumni need help sustaining that collective action. Approximately one in five of the alumni responding to this survey reported that they would value help to maintain closer connections with each other than

they find themselves able to maintain on their own. This desire is even stronger when there are multiple cohorts from the same community who could be helped to forge and sustain such connections.

In addition to the interest in help to maintain cohort linkages, survey respondents also express interest in opportunities for further “brush-up” training. Mobilization is the topic in which they are most interested in further development, but there are many other skills in the program’s curriculum that they feel they would like to further develop.

The BCLP and BRCLP would benefit from a deeper analysis of impact through community case studies that would allow for a deeper examination of the impacts of the programs, including a richer description of activities after training and a more complete understanding of how alumni use their training, including the factors that affect that use. Finally, it would yield a more complete and nuanced understanding of the kinds of impacts that participants’ training and their subsequent activities have had on the health of the communities who have sent cohorts to be trained.

Background and methodology

The Blandin Foundation operates the Blandin Community Leadership Program and the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program. Together these are considered the Foundation's core leadership programs. Selected participants represent the diversity of the community, from a variety of professions, backgrounds, and current positions of responsibility. Instruction is based on specific principles of community leadership, using a curriculum designed by the foundation and developed incrementally over time.

Since 1985, the Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP) has provided intensive leadership training to over 5,331 emerging and established community leaders from 380 communities throughout rural Minnesota. The program is nationally recognized and works with emerging and established leaders in rural communities to:

- Expand their perspectives from individual passion and interest to shared vision and community action
- Recognize and build on their community's multiple and diverse assets
- Create sustainable efforts that have long-term impact, personally and for the community

In the years included in the survey, 28 cohorts were trained per year. Each cohort was made up of approximately 24 individuals recruited from one community, or from a group of small communities geographically close to each other.

Since 2001, the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program (BRCLP) has strived to develop and sustain healthy reservation communities by building on community strengths. The BRCLP has trained 160 leaders in 10 of the 11 Minnesota Indian Reservations. In the years included in the survey, one cohort was trained each year, including approximately 24 individuals from any of the Ojibwe and Sioux nations with reservations in Minnesota.

The Blandin Foundation contracted with Wilder Research in April of 2009 to conduct a statewide survey of Leadership Program alumni from three years of cohorts (2002, 2004 and 2007). This report presents the results of 235 questionnaires completed in May and June of 2009.

Study approach

The primary data collection method used for this study was a web-based self-administered questionnaire with a telephone interview alternative. The Blandin Foundation provided Wilder Research with a list of 2002, 2004, and 2007 Leadership Program alumni names and contact information. These alumni received an invitation to participate in the survey by email. If no email address was available, or if the email message bounced back, a U.S. mail letter was sent out. Both the email invitations and the U.S. mail invitations provided information about how to access the web survey (an actual link to the survey was embedded in the email invitation), including unique login codes so Wilder could track which alumni had completed the survey. They also contained a toll-free phone number for Wilder Research that the alumni could call if they preferred to complete the survey on the phone. Professional survey interviewers were assigned and trained to take these calls.

After one week, all alumni who had not yet responded to the survey were sent a reminder email. Additional email reminders were sent weekly and bi-weekly during the final week. Alumni without email addresses were contacted by phone and reminded to complete the survey, either online or over the phone.

Response rate

The cohorts included in this study included a total of 652 alumni. Of these, we were unable to obtain current contact information (by email, U.S. mail, or phone) for 20. Of the 632 alumni who are known or presumed to have received an invitation to complete the survey, 235 completed it. This number yields a response rate of 37 percent of those invited to participate (or 36% of all those in the eligible cohorts).

Although we did not track the exact number of alumni who completed the survey over the phone versus on the web, we do know that a very small proportion (less than 10%) completed the survey using the alternative telephone administration method.

1. Distribution of respondents by community and year

Cohort	Year	Number of completed surveys	Percent of total
Albert Lea	2007	12	5.1%
Big Stone Lake Area	2002	6	2.6%
Reservation cohorts	2002, 2005, 2007	20	8.5%
Cannon Falls/Randolph/Zumbrota	2005	8	3.4%
Central Range	2005	8	3.4%
Clay County	2002	6	2.6%
Duluth	2007	10	4.3%
Edge of the Wilderness	2002	10	4.3%
Faribault	2002, 2007	17	7.2%
Granite Falls + Montevideo	2002	4	1.7%
Itasca Area I	2005	11	4.7%
Itasca Area II	2005	11	4.7%
Luverne	2007	12	5.1%
Morris	2005	10	4.3%
Mountain Lake/Windom	2002	5	2.1%
New Ulm	2002, 2007	16	6.8%
Northfield	2005	10	4.3%
Northhome/S. Lake/Big Falls/Kelliher	2007	11	4.7%
Pine River/Pequot Lakes/Backus	2005	9	3.8%
Redwood Falls	2005	6	2.6%
Springfield/Sleepy Eye/Comfrey + Hanska	2002	9	3.8%
Staples-Motley	2007	7	3.0%
Winona area	2002	6	2.6%
Winsted	2007	11	4.7%
Total	2007	235	100.0%

2. Surveys completed, by year of training

Year	Number of completed surveys	Percent
2002	63	27%
2004	77	33%
2007	95	40%
Total	235	100%

3. Still living and/or working in the same community in which you participated in BCLP/BRCLP?

Year	Number of alumni still in same community	Percent still in same community
2002 (N=63)	55	87%
2004 (N=77)	73	95%
2007 (N=95)	91	96%

Survey results

Characteristics of responding alumni

Demographic information was collected from alumni, including age group, gender, race, and the name of the community in which they live.

Age group

Statewide, the largest number of respondents were in the 45-54 age group (40%), followed by the 55-64 group (26%). The age distribution within each year mirrored the statewide age distribution. See Figure 4.

4. Age groups of respondents, by year participating in training

	Age group							
	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+
2002 (N=63)	-	6%	9%	40%	35%	8%	-	2%
2004 (N=77)	-	6%	21%	39%	30%	4%	-	-
2007 (N=95)	1%	1%	6%	25%	41%	17%	5%	4%

Gender

The distribution of men and women was evenly divided statewide. Approximately half (51%) of the respondents were male and half (49%) were female, as shown in Figure 5. The distribution was similar within each year.

5. Gender of respondents, by year participating in training

Year	Male	Female
2002 (N=63)	49%	51%
2004 (N=77)	50%	50%
2007 (N=95)	53%	47%

Ethnicity

Alumni were asked what ethnicity they consider themselves. Statewide, 87 percent of the respondents were White; 10 percent were American Indian/Alaskan Native; and 1 percent were Hispanic or Latino. All other ethnic groups were represented by less than 1 percent of all respondents. This pattern was reflected within each year except for 2007 where 13 percent of the respondents reported themselves as American Indian/Alaskan Native.

Figure 6 shows the ethnicity of respondents for each year and compares them with demographic information from the U.S. Census for greater Minnesota (all counties outside the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area). The BCLP/BRCLP alumni represented in this survey appear to be generally representative of the population of greater Minnesota. In each year American Indians have been overrepresented. Other groups represent very small proportions of the total population, so variation from year to year among program participants is to be expected.

6. Ethnicity of respondents, by year participating in training

	2002		2004		2007	
	Survey respondents (N=63)	All rural MN adults (N=1,738,678)	Survey respondents (N=77)	All rural MN adults (N=1,782,898)	Survey respondents (N=95)	All rural MN adults (N=1,837,320)
American Indian or Alaskan Native	9%	1.7%	5%	1.7%	13%	1.8%
Asian or Pacific Islander	2%	1.0%	-	1.1%	-	1.2%
African American	-	0.7%	-	0.8%	1%	0.9%
Hispanic or Latino	-	1.8%	1%	1.9%	2%	2.0%
White	89%	96.5%	92%	96.2%	81%	95.9%
Other (includes mixed ethnicity)	-	0.5%	1%	0.6%	2%	0.6%

Statistics for "All rural MN adults" from U.S. Census Bureau, Intercensal estimates.

Engagement in leadership activities

The Blandin Foundation Leadership Team was interested in gaining a better understanding of how the BCLP and BRCLP trainings have influenced the leadership practices, skills and activities of alumni. In order to assess this, respondents were asked to respond to a list of leadership activities, ranking each item on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often) based on the frequency with which they engaged in the leadership activity *before* attending the BCLP or BRCLP and *after* the training.

Leadership practices before and after training

The BCLP and BRCLP help rural leaders to develop and enhance the skills needed to build and sustain healthy communities. Responses to questions about alumni engagement in specific leadership activities before and after training provide us with a better understanding of several aspects of the training programs:

- The impact that the training might have on the development of leadership skills;
- Insight into the skills and practices that community leaders are taking with them from the training and translating into practice; and
- Insight into the areas of strength of the training.

Key findings suggest that those leadership activities that involve engaging and involving other community members are the types of leadership practices in which alumni showed the greatest change from before to after training. Before attending BCLP/BRCLP, 26 percent of alumni reported that they *listen to others and give people a voice and sense of ownership in the community* often or very often. After training, this response nearly tripled (74%). Another notable example is that 12 percent of alumni reported that before training they often or very often worked on *cultivating community members' strengths and talents*. After training, 63 percent of alumni reported that they did this.

Leadership activities that require a leader to 1) be in tune with his or her community, and 2) to be able to identify key characteristics about the community needs, abilities, assets, etc. are also activities that seem to have been most strengthened by the training. For example, the percentage of alumni who reported *using a variety of ways to frame and address community opportunities and challenges* often or very often before training was 17 percent, compared to 69 percent after training. Additionally, 26 percent of alumni reported *identification and knowledge of the key assets in their community* as a leadership activity that they engaged in often or very often before training, vs. 76 percent after training.

7. How much alumni engaged in a leadership activity before and after training

Leadership activities	Before BCLP/BRCLP Often/very often (100%=235)	After BCLP/BRCLP Often/very often (100%=235)	Percentage point difference
Using a variety of ways to frame and address community opportunities and challenges	17%	69%	52
Cultivating community members' strengths and talents	12%	63%	51
Listening to others and giving people a voice and sense of ownership in the community	26%	74%	48
Identifying and prioritizing possible strategies or action options	21%	69%	48
Developing a vision for your community	15%	61%	46
Promoting exchange of ideas among community members	24%	69%	45
Building consensus around an issue	24%	66%	42
Identifying an issue or need in your community	33%	75%	42
Identification and knowledge of the key assets in your community.	26%	76%	40
Mobilizing people and resources within your community on one or more community issue	22%	62%	40
Taking on a more visible leadership role	40%	77%	37
Helping people to work with each other by identifying their common goals	35%	66%	31
Making connections and working effectively with people of different backgrounds.	46%	71%	25

The key findings from analysis of these gains in leadership practices may have implications for a deeper understanding of the kinds of impact that alumni are having in their communities and the ways in which they are having the most impact. The results shown above suggest that the training strengthened alumni's repertoires both in leadership practices that engage other community members and in practices that are related to individual development (i.e., taking on a more visible leadership role).

Impact of training on leadership skills

Another perspective is seen in alumni's response to a direct question in which they were asked to name the three skills or practices that they thought were most strengthened by their BCLP/BRCLP training. The most common leadership activity mentioned was: *taking on a more visible leadership role*, mentioned by 33 percent of respondents across the three cohorts. This is also the practice with the most respondents reporting frequent use following training.

One other practice was cited by approximately one-third of respondents as most strengthened by training: *using a variety of ways to frame and address community opportunities and challenges* (32%). This practice was not the most frequently used following training, but it was the one with the greatest gain in frequency of use from before to after training (52 percentage point gain).

Two practices were mentioned as "most strengthened" by approximately one-quarter of respondents: *listening to others and giving people a voice and sense of ownership in the community*, and *mobilizing people and resources within your community on one or more community issues*. This is also a skill that alumni reported engaging in more often as a result of training. *Listening to others* is one of the skills showing the greatest increase in frequency of use as a result of training. It is interesting that so many respondents cite *mobilizing people and resources* as "most strengthened" by training, whereas this skill is not one of those most often practiced, nor is it one of the skills showing the greatest increase in frequency of use according to the prior question.

For the most part, the different years of cohorts cited the same skills most often. However, there are some differences from year to year. This almost certainly reflects differences in the curriculum in different years. In addition, in programs such as the BCLP and the BRCLP, it would not be surprising to see year-to-year differences based on random differences in the individuals and communities who participated in any given year.

The complete list of skills, and the proportion of respondents who felt each was one of the three most strengthened by the training, is shown in Table 8.

8. Skills and activities most strengthened by BCLP/BRCLP training

	2002 (N=63)	2004 (N=77)	2007 (N=95)	Total (N=235)
Taking on a more visible leadership role	38%	30%	42%	37%
Using a variety of ways to frame and address community opportunities and challenges	18%	47%	31%	32%
Listening to others and giving people a voice and sense of ownership in the community	33%	20%	25%	26%
Identifying and prioritizing possible strategies or action options	25%	25%	22%	24%
Mobilizing people and resources within your community on one or more community issue	21%	22%	25%	23%
Helping people to work with each other by identifying their common goals	17%	21%	18%	19%
Identification and knowledge of the key assets in your community.	17%	22%	16%	18%
Building consensus around an issue	21%	21%	13%	17%
Making connections and working effectively with people of different backgrounds.	16%	16%	19%	17%
Promoting exchange of ideas among community members	19%	13%	20%	17%
Developing a vision for your community	14%	18%	15%	16%
Identifying an issue or need in your community	19%	16%	15%	16%
Cultivating community members' strengths and talents	19%	8%	15%	14%

Additionally, we assessed which leadership activities alumni find to be the most important for their community work. Responses to this question might provide us with some insight into the kinds of impact that alumni are having within their communities. They also might provide some insight into topics for sustained and future engagement for further development of alumni as rural leaders. Table 9 shows the percentage of respondents who rated each of the leadership activities as one of the three the most important, by year of participation in BCLP/BRCLP.

Similarly, in the rankings of the skills that increased the most in use following training, and those most strengthened by training, in this list of “most important” skills, the top four are all skills involving others in the community, with the more individual skills following. The activity of *taking on a more visible leadership role*, which was one of the “most strengthened” activities, was not rated as one of the “most important” – a rating that would be endorsed by those responsible for the BCLP/BRCLP programs.

9. Leadership skills and activities most important for community work

	2002 (N=63)	2004 (N=77)	2007 (N=95)	Total (N=235)
Helping people to work with each other by identifying their common goals	29%	39%	32%	33%
Mobilizing people and resources within your community on one or more community issue	29%	30%	32%	30%
Making connections and working effectively with people of different backgrounds.	19%	25%	31%	26%
Listening to others and giving people a voice and sense of ownership in the community	30%	21%	25%	25%
Using a variety of ways to frame and address community opportunities and challenges	24%	29%	20%	24%
Identifying and prioritizing possible strategies or action options	30%	14%	23%	22%
Identification and knowledge of the key assets in your community.	14%	22%	18%	18%
Developing a vision for your community	19%	22%	11%	17%
Cultivating community members' strengths and talents	13%	14%	20%	16%
Taking on a more visible leadership role	16%	12%	20%	16%
Building consensus around an issue	17%	17%	14%	16%
Promoting exchange of ideas among community members	17%	12%	16%	15%
Identifying an issue or need in your community	14%	8%	9%	10%

Alumni understanding of the theory of change

The theory of change is a concept that originated within the BCLP and been used in the BCLP and BRCLP curriculum since 2003. The theory has since been adopted throughout the Foundation. For the Foundation as a whole, the theory of change is stated as:

Framing x Social Capital x Mobilization = Healthy Community

However, the BCLP and BRCLP programs do not present the concepts in this manner, and do not refer to a “theory of change” for community work. Rather, framing, social capital, and mobilization are described in the curriculum as three core competencies of community leadership.

The Blandin leadership team was interested to know about their alumni’s understanding and knowledge of the three core competencies, how they are using these competencies in the work they do in their communities, and whether they find them effective. For each of the competencies, respondents were given a brief definition of the term, and asked if they use it in their community work, and whether or not they find it effective. They were also asked to provide an example of *how* they have used it in their community.

Because the 2002 alumni did not receive specific curricula relative to these three “core competencies,” they were asked to answer the questions in whatever way was most applicable for them. Analysis is done by year of participation in the BCLP or BRCLP in order to examine the extent to which the different curricula affect leaders’ responses.

Translating the three core competencies into practice

As we asked whether and how leadership alumni are translating the theory of change into practice in their communities, we also assessed whether or not the respondents find each of the concepts effective in the work that they do. Their responses to these questions can help us to gain insight into whether or not the three core competencies constitute an effective method for community leadership. In addition, combined with the other questions in this section, their answers give us some understanding of whether or not these competencies are common knowledge for the alumni in their communities.

There is evidence that the core competencies are in use. As Figures 10 and 11 show, all three are used by a majority of respondents in all years, and the proportion is higher in the years after the curriculum incorporated the theory. Moreover, nearly all respondents who use each element report that they find it effective in their community work.

10. Do you use framing/social capital/mobilization in your community work?

	Framing “% Yes, some/ a lot	Building social capital % Yes, some/ a lot	Mobilization % Yes, some/ a lot
2002 (N=63)	73%	85%	60%
2004 (N=77)	94%	88%	68%
2007 (N=95)	93%	96%	74%

11. Is framing/social capital/mobilization effective?

(asked only of those who use it; N shows number answering each question)	Framing		Building social capital		Mobilization	
	N	% Yes, some/ a lot	N	% Yes, some/ a lot	N	% Yes, some/ a lot
2002	N=46	100%	N=54	96%	N=38	100%
2004	N=72	97%	N=68	97%	N=52	100%
2007	N=88	97%	N=91	97%	N=70	97%

Although high proportions of respondents report using the core competencies, it is evident from the examples they give that some alumni probably need more help clarifying what some of them are. Additionally, results suggest that the ways in which alumni use framing, building social capital, and mobilization vary quite a bit. Their examples show that some alumni have a clear understanding of the competencies and are able to cite relevant examples. However, for each of the three, around 15 to 20 percent either gave responses that did not answer the question or cited an example that described one of the other elements (such as giving an example of framing for the mobilization question).

The sections below discuss responses to each of the competencies separately.

Framing: recognizing and defining community issues in ways that lead to effective action

A majority of respondents from all years reported using framing in their community work “some” or “a lot,” with fewer in the 2002 cohorts (73%) and more in the 2004 and 2007 cohorts (93% and 94%, respectively). The three BRCLP cohorts were also more likely than other cohorts to report the use of framing in their work (85%). Nearly 100 percent of all those who used framing reported that they find it effective in their community work.

Respondents' examples of framing mainly illustrated the occasions on which it was employed (56% across all cohorts). Nineteen percent gave examples of *how* they had framed an issue. Eight percent gave an example of what the term meant, or explained why it was valuable. Fourteen percent gave examples of social capital or mobilization, or did not answer the question (e.g., "I can't think of anything" or unclear fragments such as, "way finding signs").

12. Please give one example of how you have used framing in your work in the community (question asked only of those who reported they use framing; open-ended responses, coded by theme)

	2002 (N=43)	2004 (N=71)	2007 (N=86)
Example of when framing was used	44%	55%	62%
Example of how an issue was framed	19%	24%	15%
Example of social capital or mobilization	21%	9%	14%
Example of why framing is beneficial; gave a definition	14%	4%	7%
Gave an example of when framing was not successful	-	1%	1%
Don't know, or response did not answer the question	12%	7%	5%

Among examples of *when* framing was used, the most common theme was "getting buy-in from stakeholders" (17% of total responses). The other common times when framing was used were during strategic planning or goal setting with organizations (6%) or residents (3%). Nineteen percent gave examples of *how* they had framed an issue, including examples framing issues as beneficial to residents (7%) or more generally putting an issue in a positive light (7%).

When asked to provide an example of how they have used framing, many respondents commented on why they made a decision to use framing, or why they find it effective in their community. The following responses illustrate the range of responses:

- In properly framing an issue, you can save time, create clarity in discussion, and minimize confusion, keeping the discussion on target.
- I am on the [names of] boards. Framing is essential in determining needs and implementing programs to meet those needs.
- I now work in a different community, in a place that has a consensus-driven culture and yet top-down decision-making. I rely on the skills I developed at Blandin to frame issues for upper management, to mobilize the staff and, especially, to pick my battles. The framing concepts were probably the most important tools I took from the process.
- I try to remember to frame the issue in any discussion to make sure everyone is understanding what we are talking about.

In the economic climate I am continually framing this as an opportunity – to revisit what we do and to question why we do it. We may not have the financial resources to do any projects right now, but we can use the time to plan.

Our meth task force was no longer focused on a task. Framing principles were used to identify a new focus and agenda.

I am currently leading a community revitalization project called [...]. We have used the framing concept often in approaching issues and in fact I have "taught" it a bit to others. It is wonderful and works so well to avoid future disagreements.

We work on a committee to see how an existing building could be used for the community and also be economical for the community. This was an exercise in getting many people of many ideas to at least see the different needs and possibilities. The outcome is still undecided.

The way I find framing most successful is in demonstrating to another person how a supposed challenge or obstacle can also be perceived as an opportunity.

The survey asked alumni whether they feel that the BCLP/BRCLP training for their cohort has resulted in broad community impact and/or change. Of those who answered “yes,” 91 percent also reported using framing in the work they do in their communities, and 20 percent report using it “a lot.” The following are some examples of how alumni are using framing that include indications of its potential impact on their community.

Our community was able to complete a plan for a paved hiking and biking trail by framing the proposed trail in a variety of ways – safety issue, lifestyle amenity, economic development driver.

Identifying people of stature within the community that could support and/or contribute to the development of the projects.

Developing and implementing youth activities in our community. Several graduates from Blandin have formed the group... By framing what we want to accomplish and how we should accomplish these goals, we have kept on course to establish several youth activities in our community.

Realized the need for a community leadership program and helped get it off the ground and running.

Our county is tackling [an] underage substance abuse coalition. We have done several assessments, town hall meetings, evaluations, bringing stakeholders together to discuss what the issues are and what the next steps need to be. Since the training we have received a large federal grant and have extended county-wide with 26 committee members throughout each community in [county]. Each community needs to address its own issues along with those "county wide."

Building social capital: the development and maintenance of relationships that allow us to work together across our differences

For the skill of building social capital, respondents in the 2002 cohort (which did not receive the theory of change curriculum) and those in the 2004 cohort were approximately equal in the proportions (85% and 88%) who reported using the skill of building social capital in their communities “some” or “a lot.” Nearly 100 percent of 2007 participants reported using this skill. Nearly 100 percent of those who built social capital reported that they find it to be effective in their community work.

In alumni’s examples of using the skill of building social capital, 71 percent of responses across all three years illustrate the development or use of social capital. Eleven percent defined the term or explained why the skill is useful, but did not give an example of using it. Seven percent gave examples that described framing or mobilization, and 10 percent gave responses that did not answer the question. Figure 13 below shows the distribution of responses by year.

13. Please give one example of how you have used or strengthened your social capital in your work in the community (question asked only of those who reported they use the skill of building social capital; open-ended responses, coded by theme)

	2002 (N=54)	2004 (N=67)	2007 (N=87)
Example of using the skill of building social capital	67%	78%	69%
Example of framing or mobilization	11%	2%	8%
Example of why building social capital is beneficial or important; gave a definition	11%	6%	15%
Example of when building social capital was not successful	2%	6%	2%
Don't know, or response did not answer the question	11%	9%	9%

Among the examples that illustrated social capital, three themes were most common. The most frequently mentioned was relationship building in general (28%). Seventeen percent described making or maintaining connections with community leaders, and 13 percent described participation in some kind of networking activity.

The following examples illustrate the variety of examples given for the use or strengthening of social capital:

In the same organization, the staff has a history of being divided into several camps or "silos" that seem to view each other as competition. Over time, we (as a board and as individual board members) have been able to gain the trust of the "silos." Their increased faith in our intentions has made implementing changes easier.

By connecting with people, you can jump hurdles that may be difficult to do otherwise.

As a [...] board member we try very hard to keep communication open to anyone who may help us keep the doors open or may be a potential benefactor to [the organization].

Have participated in discussions among culturally diverse groups in order to develop relationships which will help bridge our gaps and work better together.

It can work when alliances for common causes can work together while respecting differences on other issues. Making sure discussions don't get personal.

For both of the projects, we called upon people who we had relationships with that had the different skills, resources and pull needed for the projects, e.g., community members, community employees, board of trustees, volunteers, etc.

We have pulled people in with all types of skills and talents from different areas within the community to help keep the [...] programs available for the community at an extremely reasonable cost. We now have grant writers, accountants, etc. working together to preserve this program.

The examples provided in response to the survey suggest that building social capital is a leadership concept and skill that is well used by many alumni and perhaps one that has reached a level of practice and understanding beyond the leadership curriculum.

Of respondents who felt that the BCLP/BRCLP training for their cohort has resulted in broad community impact, 93 percent also reported using social capital in the work they do in their communities, and 40 percent reported using it “a lot.” The following examples illustrate how building social capital is contributing to community impact:

I think this is what you do all the time. You try for good solid relationships – ones don't always go the way we all want that but they have integrity and respect all the time. Being transparent is of major importance and I can't think of one example, just ongoing work.

We needed to receive county commissioner approved as part of a funding package. Had developed good relations based on trust in information that I would present over the years. This trust allowed for quick passage.

Worked with local historical group to help improve the facility. Was able to help secure a grant for new windows.

Mobilization: engaging a critical mass in taking action to achieve specific outcomes

Interestingly, when asked if they use mobilization in their community work, a significantly smaller proportion of respondents reported “Yes, some” or “Yes, a lot” than

for the other two categories. For example, 68 percent and 74 percent of alumni from 2004 and 2007, respectively, report using mobilization and even fewer from 2002. These findings suggest either that mobilization may be a concept that is not as well understood as the other aspects of the theory of change, or that the brief description used in the survey was not a good match for the way they think about it; or perhaps that this component of the theory of change is more difficult to put into practice for many community leaders. However, of those who report using it, nearly 100 percent report that they find mobilization to be effective in their community work.

Although fewer respondents report using mobilization their community, those who do use it are equally able to provide examples of its use (69% across all cohorts). Eight percent of examples did not illustrate its use, but did define it or say why it is important. Six percent of responses were examples of framing or social capital, rather than mobilization. Fifteen percent of responses did not answer the question (such as, “by completing our comprehensive plan”). Figure 14 shows the distribution of responses by year.

14. Please give one example of how you have used mobilization in your work in the community (question asked only of those who reported they use the skill of building social capital; open-ended responses, coded by theme)

	2002 (N=38)	2004 (N=52)	2007 (N=70)
Example of using mobilization	68%	81%	61%
Example of framing or social capital	3%	8%	6%
Example of why mobilization is beneficial or important; gave a definition	8%	4%	11%
Example of when mobilization was not successful	5%	2%	4%
Don't know, or response did not answer the question	18%	8%	19%

Among the meaningful examples, the most common theme was of mobilization being used to build public support for an issue or policy (20%). Other common themes were increasing participation in the community (13%) and raising funds or donations (12%).

The following illustrate the range of examples provided for mobilization. Many of the responses did not convey the notion of “critical mass,” and some seemed more related to framing or social capital than mobilization. It appears from the responses that some people may think of mobilization as part of social capital, because that is how they make connections with enough people or the right people. Others confuse it with framing, because that is how they get people engaged enough to contribute. Since mobilization often follows framing and the development of social capital in the sequence of an action plan, it may also be the case that fewer respondents report using mobilization because

fewer have gotten far enough into a mature action plan to have had occasion to call on that competency.

I do not have an example that comes to mind but I have become more assertive.

As a task force of the water park referendum, a huge effort was placed on mobilizing supporters of the project and engaging them in the whole process.

The [...] park committee was struggling to get funding and I helped them as they worked with city council to get recognition and support.

We will be using it to sell the safety center project to the public in these economic times. We hope to be effective. Laying out the safety concerns will be crucial.

Using new technology to communicate does seem to help connect people.

By involving many people in a project and setting it in motion, the project did not seem to be overwhelming as it may have been otherwise.

Our hope out of this new "committee" is to present a summit to a large body of people to energize them into action.

Seeking "champions" for community development drivers.

By bringing representatives from the county with [county visioning organization] it will hopefully continue to generate more interest from within each city and create a network of resources to assist in the success of the program.

I think this one of the things that happens more subtly when trying to engage in community work. In [name of community] it takes a long time to build a critical mass and push towards mobilization, especially on large projects. Mobilization is always the trickiest part of any movement or goal.

An organization I do volunteer work for needs help. This organization has lost a lot of stature over time principally due to poor management. I would like to help them restore their image but in talking to people, my "sense" of things is there is not sufficient "mass" yet to accomplish that goal. But the tide is rising and soon there will be a critical mass available. Pointless to try without it!

Of those who felt that the BCLP/BRCLP training for their cohort has resulted in broad community impact or change, 73 percent of alumni are using mobilization in their community work, and 20 percent report using it "a lot." These percentages are lower than for framing and building social capital. This finding, like those cited above, suggest that this aspect of the theory of change may not be well understood or perhaps more difficult to put into practice than the others. However, the following quotes from respondents illustrate the work of a core of alumni who are using mobilization to strengthen their communities.

Framing a specific legislative issue as it relates to our community; reaching out to our collective social capital; creating a call to action for all to contact the legislators with a common message.

This is the most difficult piece to do. I am trying to mobilize my board to work on agency capacity. I'm setting the stage with information and discussion; hope to get them to take action this fall.

Being chairperson of a national organization, we have to “rally the troops” often and “mobilize” them into action for a common goal. I love to empower people and help them realize their potential. Our Early Childhood initiative is one of the strongest in Minnesota and only tribal ECI, and we have been able to mobilize people and agencies to come to the table and talk EC!

One recent example is the mobilization of different people from across town to beautify the main street in town. This has included artists, businesses, grant writers, and the local chamber.

By identifying several people who could take the next steps, I moved away from being one of a few voices on a [local] issue to having the luxury of watching others carry it forward sustainably.

Impact on the community

After gaining some perspective at the individual level, it is important to also assess the potential impact that cohorts of leaders have on their communities.

The format of this survey, with mainly closed-ended questions, is not the preferred method to discern this more in-depth kind of impact. We have no way to probe for reasons behind these brief responses to understand how alumni think about the issues or what they understand by the term “impact.” Nevertheless, alumni responses do provide some insight into where they have focused their efforts, and can therefore illuminate areas where we might expect to change to be most likely to occur.

Alumni contributions to the community

In response to a Yes or No question, three-quarters of respondents (77%) reported that the BCLP/BRCLP training for their cohort has resulted in broad community impact or change. On an individual level, one kind of alumni impact on their respective communities can be related to the position that they hold within their community. Well over half (60%) of respondents reported that their position in the community has changed since they participated in the training. In the words of one respondent, “There have been members who successfully ran for city and county office [and] others who stepped up and signed on for projects and committees. I believe that in a number of cases, that wouldn't have happened without BCLP.”

Those who said their position was changed, were also asked how much the BCLP or BRCLP training contributed to this change, using a scale where 1 meant “not at all” and 5 meant “a great deal.” Nearly two-thirds of this group (65%) gave answers in the top two possible ratings (4 or 5), indicating the training contributed significantly to their attaining their new positions.

Effectiveness of combining the core competencies

Combining answers to the three questions about use of the core competencies and the question asking whether training had resulted in community impact, we see clear evidence that greater use of the elements of the foundation's theory of change contribute to greater community impact. The more of the three core competencies a respondent reported using, the greater the likelihood that that respondent also reported that the cohort's training had resulted in community impact. Among respondents who used none of the core competences, only 43 percent reported community impact. If they reported using one of the three core competencies, the percentage rose to 52 percent who reported

community impact. Among those who used two of the competencies, 75 percent reported impact, and of those who used all three, 83 percent reported that the cohort's training had resulted in community impact or change.

15. Relationship between use of core competencies and community impact

Number of core competencies used	Do you feel that the BCLP/BRCLP training for your cohort has resulted in any broad community impact or change?					
	Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
0	3	43%	4	57%	7	100%
1	11	52%	10	48%	21	100%
2	47	75%	16	25%	63	100%
3	120	83%	24	17%	144	100%
Total	181	77%	54	23%	235	100%

The correlation is strong enough that it is not likely that it could have resulted from chance (p=.002).

Type of community contributions

Respondents were asked to describe what they consider to be the most significant efforts or contributions that their cohort has made in their community since training. When we grouped their open-ended responses according to the themes in them, we found that several alumni (23%) felt that they had increased social capital within and even beyond their leadership group. Others reported increased volunteering among alumni (19%) as well as participation in more community events or projects (20%).

Many alumni also acknowledged the fact that significant impact is difficult and takes time. Responses contain many examples of subtle or smaller scale changes as a result of leadership training, but comments indicate that many alumni are very much aware that larger impacts lie further down the road for them.

I think this is a subtle change that occurs one person at a time and brick by brick until a house is built. You need to get the best bricks you can and slowly build the foundation and the walls before you can finish your house. Each one of our cohort is a brick in the foundation of our "house."

I think there has been some community impact, but not significant change. It takes a larger group than one cohort to make significant community change.

I think "broad" is the key word here vs. "specific." Again, I see the individuals demonstrating their specific skills, and using their leadership training. Change comes slowly, but I see the community as a different place than it was 5-10 years ago, which includes the influence of not only our cohort but the previous cohort as well.

Some comments reiterate the strengthening of leadership skills, some also cited specific activities undertaken by cohort members, but were cautious about claiming any broader impact as a result:

I can't think of a specific project, but I see many of the members of our cohort being more intentional in their community efforts, framing issues better, drawing on others, etc. to move forward a lot of community projects.

Several members worked on the Poverty Reduction Action Team identifying strategies to address poverty. Several community education events, surveys, etc were? conducted. Much of the Circles community engagement work is supported by members from our cohort.

Establishment of a HORIZONS group to help with poverty concerns.

...What has happened is [that] we now have a group of leaders who are better equipped to address community issues, draw people together and make better use of their ability to interact with others for positive change.

Some respondents reported community impact related to the leadership training, but were cautious about claiming that it was the only reason for community change that had occurred:

A number of projects are now occurring. It is difficult to say that none of this would have happened without Blandin but I know for certain much of it would not. As a group we did not develop a project – however as we encounter one another around issues, in board meetings and within clubs and organizations, it is evident that the lessons learned developed our thinking and gave us tools to better lead the community in myriad ways.

Some respondents had no hesitation in identifying community impact that they felt was a result of the training:

The biggest example might be the coming together and building AND maintaining of the Boys & Girls Club. Another would be the housing in [sub-community], 34 houses in my community that in the early stages was trying to be blocked by those who lived around the proposed area. I used community meetings of both sides to come to a conclusion of the project going forward.

There are many significant efforts and contributions over the years in [community] since we have had four groups of graduates, and many [have] even won awards (like our Intergenerational facility and the 9.3 million dollar community center). Also having our community chosen to have the Governor's Design Team come to [community] was also wonderful.

Some responses drew a clear link between community impact and the relationships built during training, which is one of the hallmarks of Blandin's cohort model of training. Some of these stated or implied that continued communication and mutual support was more likely to have community impact than actions by individuals who acted on their own:

I have always been involved in community activities. BCLP gave me a better network. As a cohort, we did not make a significant effort to contribute to an issue. When we left BCLP it was back to individual business and our own organizational issues.

We have called on each other in a wide variety of needs. Barriers have been broken down and we relate to each other better.

A small minority did not feel there had been any impact, and appeared not to expect any:

I'm not quite sure what to say here. Pretty much everyone that was involved in the leadership of the community before the training is still involved, and those that weren't, still aren't. Those who were involved in economic issues, still are involved, those who were involved in social issues still are.

Impact related to Blandin Foundation's strategic priorities

The Blandin Foundation's current strategic plan has six strategic priorities for community capacity and community change. To assess the extent to which the core leadership training programs are helping the Foundation meet the goals of its strategic plan, alumni were asked to rate how much they think each of these strategic priorities has been affected by their cohort as a result of their training. Please refer to the appendix for further analysis of impact based on the eight dimensions of healthy community.

The current strategic plan was adopted in December 2006, and was thus not in effect at the time the 2002 and 2004 cohorts were trained. By the time the 2007 cohort has achieved significant impact, the Foundation will likely have a different plan than the current one. Moreover, the purpose of the BCLP and BRCLP programs are to empower diverse leaders to act on their own passions and priorities. The Foundation does not expect that alumni will necessarily act in their communities based on the Foundation's strategic priorities?? at the time they receive their training. Nevertheless, answers to this survey clearly show that respondents feel their community work is consistent with Foundation priorities.

As would be expected, results suggest that alumni feel that they have most affected the priority of *a critical mass of leaders prepared to identify and address issues*. Next most frequently, they also report that *community members now have and use a voice for influencing larger discussions on issues affecting rural communities*.

A notable finding is that the 2007 cohorts report higher percentages of alumni who believe that each of these strategic priorities has been impacted or greatly impacted by their cohort as a result of training. This is a surprising result, since this is the cohort that has had the least time to implement what they learned in their training. One possible reason could be that their lesser experience applying their skills, and observing results, make them less accurate in estimating the extent of change. Another possibility is that this group, the first to be trained after the Foundation’s adoption of the current strategic plan, were more attuned than previous cohorts to these six priority areas and were more sensitized to seek or recognize opportunities to apply their training in projects that matched the foundation’s focus areas. Figure 16 shows the results for each strategic priority, by year of attendance. Respondents were asked to rate the extent of impact, using a scale where 0 meant “no impact” and 5 meant “great impact.” A score of 4 or 5 thus indicates substantial impact, and the percentages shown are for this level of response.

16. Rate how much you think each of the following has been affected by your cohort as a result of training (0=no impact, 5=great impact)

Percent reporting extent of impact as 4 or 5 on a scale of 0 to 5	2002 (N=63)	2004 (N=77)	2007 (N=95)
Community now has a critical mass of leaders prepared to identify and address issues	46%	51%	62%
Community members now have and use a “voice” for influencing larger discussions on issues affecting rural communities	48%	51%	60%
Community creates and supports a culture that values educational attainment for all	42%	39%	53%
Community and/or region has undertaken economic initiatives that capitalize on diverse assets	38%	37%	51%
Residents engage with and learn from each other in ways that strengthen working effectively across differences	48%	37%	50%
Community supports social justice initiatives that promote fairness and opportunity	32%	33%	38%

Sustained engagement with the Blandin Foundation

Respondents were asked to describe which continuing involvement or supports they and their communities have received from the Blandin Foundation since their participation in the BCLP or BRCLP. The majority of respondents most often cited the Community Leader Newsletter (72% of cases) as the main source of their continued involvement with the Foundation. Other activities mentioned were follow-up workshops (43% of cases) and participation in other Blandin sponsored activities (30% of cases). Eleven percent of respondents reported that their cohort had received a Quick Start grant, and 20 percent of individuals reported receiving another type of Blandin grant.

In order to ascertain whether or not engagement with the Foundation might change over time, analysis was done by year of participation in BCLP/BRCLP. Results show a picture of sustained engagement, illustrated by the substantial minority of 2004 and 2002 alumni who report involvement in follow-up workshops and Blandin-sponsored activities. The majority of alumni found the continuing involvement that they received either somewhat helpful or very helpful.

17. Continuing involvement or supports received since training

	2002 (N=63)	2004 (N=77)	2007 (N=95)	Of those who received the item, percent reporting it as...	
				Somewhat helpful	Very helpful
Quick start grant	10%	14%	10%	31%	69%
Other grant(s)	27%	25%	12%	26%	70%
Follow-up workshops	44%	40%	44%	44%	54%
Participation in other Blandin-sponsored activity	35%	35%	22%	24%	60%
Community Leader newsletter	71%	71%	73%	66%	21%
Other	13%	6%	4%	24%	35%

“Other” responses included graduations and anniversary/reunion events and three alumni who named a topic area (perhaps indicating availability of Blandin staff to consult on the topic). Local alumni groups were named by alumni in Clay County, Edge of the Wilderness, Duluth, Faribault, and Luverne.

Alumni needs

Alumni also had the opportunity to describe the kinds of continuing involvement they would find most useful in their work as community leaders. The following were the needs most often mentioned in their open-ended responses:

- Follow-up training and workshops (26% of all respondents)
- Help to organize alumni reunions (particularly if more than one cohort has gone through in a particular community) (18%)
- Grant money (9%)
- Help mobilizing the community (6%)

One-third of respondents (32%) indicated that they had no desire for additional engagement or support that were not already available to them. Among the others who did make suggestions, there was a consistent interest in continued engagement and training as rural leaders, as reflected in the following comments:

Follow up workshops. I would encourage [the Foundation] to do [these] once a year for 3-4 years after the training. This will help group to stay focused on the common goal(s).

Mini-leadership gatherings. I see that so many of us are so busy with our own business and volunteer positions in the community it is difficult for someone to take the ball and form another reunion!

Continuing [community] reunions or intentional gatherings of BCLP alums because in this world we are so busy we need the umbrella of Blandin Foundation to help make that happen and perhaps with the results of this survey could be the reason behind a reunion/gathering.

I would love to participate in a "stage 2" workshop or training that would use the tools from the week-long workshop and get into more depth and sophistication. I would also find useful a retrospective reflection opportunity, either individually or as a cohort, on what we've done with the training.

Further development of leadership skills

In the context of needs surrounding sustained engagement with the alumni, it is helpful to examine which leadership skills respondents reported they would most like to further develop. Chosen from the same list of skills and activities as the earlier questions, the responses were remarkably evenly distributed, except for one clear top choice and two last place choices. The leadership practice most often mentioned was *mobilizing people*

and resources within your community on one or more community issue, which was chosen by 31 percent of all respondents. Most other skills were selected by 17 to 24 percent each. Only three skills were chosen by fewer than 10 percent of respondents.

18. Leadership skills respondents would most like to further develop

Skill	Percent of respondents (All years, N=235)
Mobilizing people and resources within your community on one or more community issue	31%
Building consensus around an issue	24%
Cultivating community members' strengths and talents	23%
Identifying and prioritizing possible strategies or action options	22%
Making connections and working effectively with people of different backgrounds	22%
Promoting exchange of ideas among community members	21%
Developing a vision for your community	20%
Using a variety of ways to frame and address community opportunities and challenges	19%
Listening to others and giving people a voice and sense of ownership in the community	18%
Helping people to work with each other by identifying their common goals	17%
Taking on a more visible leadership role	9%
Identification and knowledge of the key assets in your community	9%
Identifying an issue or need in your community	5%

The repetition of mobilization as the skill most commonly cited as in need of further strengthening recapitulates themes seen earlier, in response to other questions.

Conclusions and issues to consider

There is strong evidence from this survey that Blandin Community Leadership Program and Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program training have strengthened participants' skills in ways that have stayed with them, and that alumni are practicing those skills in their communities.

The elements of the Foundation's theory of change, taught to cohorts since 2003 as three core competencies for healthy community leadership, are being used by most survey respondents. Moreover, almost all of those who use them report that they find them useful. This usefulness is borne out by the finding that those who use more of the three competencies also report a greater extent of community impact attributable to their training.

Although majorities of each cohort report using each of the three core competencies, building social capital and framing are used by significantly more respondents than mobilization. There are many indications in different parts of the survey that respondents find mobilization a more challenging concept to give examples for, and a more difficult skill to apply in their work in their communities. This may be because the brief definition of the term used in the survey was not familiar; it may be because they have had less occasion to use and practice the skill in their community work; or it may be because it is more difficult to learn during the relatively brief exposure that BCLP/BRCLP participants receive during their retreat and follow-up workshops.

Blandin's leadership training is conducted in cohorts, and it is hoped and expected that cohort members will maintain the relationships they form with others from their communities during training, and support each other in the exercise of leadership when they return to their communities. Cohort members form "Going Forward" groups at the end of the retreat to develop action plans based on issues that were identified during the training, and these groups often undertake joint activities when they return to their communities. Beyond this, however, it is not expected that entire cohorts will continue to function as a team upon completion of training. Nevertheless, around one in five of the alumni responding to this survey reported that they would value help to maintain closer connections with each other than they find themselves able to maintain on their own. This desire is even stronger when there are multiple cohorts from the same community who could be helped to forge and sustain such connections.

In addition to the interest in help to maintain cohort linkages, survey respondents also express interest in opportunities for further "brush-up" training. Mobilization is the topic in which they are most interested in further development, but there are many other skills in the program's curriculum that they feel they would like to further develop.

The BCLP and BRCLP would benefit from a deeper analysis of impact through community case studies. By methods that might include focus groups, in-depth interviews with alumni, and in-depth interviews with other members of the community, it would be possible to conduct a deeper examination of the impacts of the programs. This would include a richer description of alumni activities following training and a more complete understanding of how they view their training and how they use it. It could include a perspective on the kinds of factors inside or outside of communities that promote effective use of leadership skills. Finally, it would yield a more complete and nuanced understanding of the kinds of effects that participants' training and their subsequent activities have had on the health of the communities who have sent cohorts to be trained.

Appendix

Survey instrument

Activity and impact related to the eight dimensions of healthy communities

BCLP and BRCLP alumni survey

The Blandin Foundation Leadership Team is working to gain a better understanding of the effects of our leadership training on you as a leader and your communities. We value your feedback and hope that you will participate in our survey. Your participation is not required and will not affect your relationship with the Blandin Foundation in any way. You have the option to decline or opt out at any time. Your responses to this survey will remain confidential, and no identifying information will be shared with the Blandin Foundation or released in any report. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. We thank you for your participation!

1. According to our records, you participated in the Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP) or the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program (BRCLP) with the [name of cohort] cohort in [year]. Is that correct?
 - a. Yes ↓
 - b. No → Please enter correct information here:
 - c. Cohort (name of community): _____
 - d. Year: _____

2. Are you still living and/or working in the same community in which you participated in BCLP/BRCLP?
 - a. Yes ↓
 - b. No →
 - c. Where do you live/work now? (If different, please enter the community in which you primarily exercise leadership)
(city)_____ (state)_____
 - d. How long have you lived/worked in this community?
years_____ months_____

3. For each of the following kinds of leadership activities, please rate how much you engaged in it before attending BCLP/BRCLP and since attending BCLP/BRCLP (scale: 1=Never to 5= Very often)

Activity	How often before attending BCLP/BRCLP	How often after completing BCLP/BRCLP
a. Making connections and working effectively with people of different backgrounds.	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
b. Helping people to work with each other by identifying their common goals	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
c. Using a variety of ways to frame and address community opportunities and challenges	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
d. Taking on a more visible leadership role	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
e. Identification and knowledge of the key assets in your community.	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
f. Mobilizing people and resources within your community on one or more community issue	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
g. Developing a vision for your community	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
h. Listening to others and giving people a voice and sense of ownership in the community	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
i. Promoting exchange of ideas among community members	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
j. Building consensus around an issue	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
k. Cultivating community members' strengths and talents	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
l. Identifying an issue or need in your community	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK
m. Identifying and prioritizing possible strategies or action options	1 2 3 4 5 DK	1 2 3 4 5 DK

4. From the list of leadership activities above (Question 3), please identify the three in which you feel your skills were most strengthened by your training in the BCLP/BRCLP: (in each space below, enter the letter of that activity or a brief description of another activity that is not on the list; If you are unsure, enter "DK" in the space below or if you felt none of your skills was strengthened enter "NONE" in the spaces below.

- a. #1 _____
 b. #2 _____
 c. #3 _____

5. Which three leadership activities do you find most important in your community work? (same instructions)

- a. #1 _____
 b. #2 _____
 c. #3 _____

6. What leadership skills would you most like to further develop?)
- #1 _____
 - #2 _____
 - #3 _____
7. Part of the BCLP/BRCLP training concerns the use of framing, or recognizing and defining community issues in ways that lead to effective action. [2002 alumni: We realize that the curriculum you received was organized differently and did not use this term. Please answer questions a-c below in whatever way is applicable for you.]
- Do you use framing in your community work? [scale 1=No, 2=Yes, some, 3=Yes, a lot]
 - Is it effective ? [scale 1=No, 2=Yes, some, 3=Yes, a lot]
 - Please give one example of how you have used framing in your work in the community:

8. Another part of the BCLP/BRCLP training concerns social capital, or the development and maintenance of relationships that allow us to work together across our differences. [2002 alumni: We realize that the curriculum you received was organized differently and did not use this term. Please answer questions a-c below in whatever way is applicable for you.]
- Do you use the skill of building social capital in your community work? [scale 1=No, 2=Yes, some, 3=Yes, a lot]
 - Is it effective ? [scale 1=No, 2=Yes, some, 3=Yes, a lot]
 - Please give one example of how you have used or strengthened your social capital in your work in the community: _____
9. Another part of the BCLP/BRCLP training concerns mobilization, or engaging a critical mass in taking action to achieve specific outcomes. [2002 alumni: We realize that the curriculum you received was organized differently and did not use this term. Please answer questions a-c below in whatever way is applicable for you.]
- Do you use mobilization in your community work? [scale 1=No, 2=Yes, some, 3=Yes, a lot]
 - Is it effective ? [scale 1=No, 2=Yes, some, 3=Yes, a lot]
 - Please give one example of how you have used mobilization in your work in the community:

10. Please describe what you consider to be one of the most significant efforts or contributions of your cohort in your community since the training:

DEMOGRAPHICS:

15. What is your age group?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ¹ 15-19 | <input type="checkbox"/> ⁶ 55-64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ² 20-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> ⁷ 65-74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ³ 25-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> ⁸ 75-84 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ⁴ 35-44 | <input type="checkbox"/> ⁹ 85+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ⁵ 45-54 | <input type="checkbox"/> ⁻⁸ Prefer not to answer |

16. What is your gender?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ¹ Male | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ² Female | <input type="checkbox"/> ⁸ Prefer not to answer |

17. What ethnicity do you consider yourself?

- ¹ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ² Asian or Pacific Islander
- ³ African American
- ⁴ Hispanic or Latino
- ⁵ Native African
- ⁶ White
- ⁷ Other (includes mixed ethnicity)
- ⁻⁸ Prefer not to answer

END OF SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to help the Blandin Foundation strengthen its programs.

Activity and impact related to the eight dimensions of healthy communities

The BCLP and BRCLP curriculum identified eight dimensions of healthy communities:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Community leadership | • Infrastructure and service |
| • Economic opportunity | • Lifelong learning |
| • Spirituality, recreation and art | • Safety and security |
| • Valuing diversity | • Environmental stewardship |

Because of the need to keep the survey to a manageable length, respondents were not asked about how their community work related to each of these eight dimensions. Therefore we are unable to identify the impact that alumni have on these dimensions. However, we were able to make some inferences, based on answers to other questions. Four questions in particular asked for examples of respondents' work in the community: those that asked for examples of framing, building social capital, and mobilization, and the one that asked for a description of what has changed as a result of the cohort's training. The answers to these questions give only a small window into community activity and outcomes, but anything we can see and describe through that window provides us with a minimum estimate of actual effort and impact.

To create this minimum estimate, we conducted a separate review of the responses, examining all four of those open-ended answers for each respondent. If any of the answers for a given individual included an example that was related to the "community leadership" dimension (such as "Individually, I think each of the participants have been a stronger leader in their community"), that individual was coded to indicate that dimension.

In this coding process, we made a distinction between comments that only mentioned activity or effort on a certain dimension vs. those that reported some kind of observable change.

Examples of mentions that were considered "effort" are:

In preparation for a Small Cities Grant Application we met with downtown business owners to determine their need for low cost funds or grant dollars to rehabilitate their store fronts and 2nd and 3rd story apartments. We crafted the application to fit the needs identified by the building owners. The meetings also served to introduce the owners to what the program could do. This built support for the program. [Economic opportunity dimension]

During our recent fund raising effort for our local theatre, I personally contacted/solicited those people I felt I would have success with because I had helped them with some of their previous projects. [Spiritual, recreational, and artistic expression dimension]

Examples of comments that were considered “change” are:

I have interacted with community members that are more diverse and shared different ideas and culture information with them, meeting more and more people and therefore enjoying a larger amount of social capital. [Valuing diversity dimension]

I feel that the group who attended are connected in many ways and seek each other out for problem solving. It appears that we have changed some community attitudes to "can do" rather than "no way." [Community leadership dimension]

The dimension in which effort was most often mentioned was economic opportunity, which was mentioned in the open-ended examples given by 25 percent of respondents. The dimension in which actual change was most often cited was community leadership, which was mentioned in at least one answer by 50 percent of respondents.

A1. Dimensions of healthy community mentioned in open-ended responses (N=235 respondents)

8 Dimensions	No mention	Examples include effort in this dimension	Examples include community change in this dimension
Community leadership	49%	1%	50%**
Economic opportunity	69%	25%	6%
Spirituality, recreation, and art	73%	17%	10%
Valuing diversity	77%	14%	9%
Infrastructure and service*	81%	12%	7%
Lifelong learning	83%	12%	5%
Safety and security	91%	8%	1%
Environmental stewardship	93%	6%	1%

* Infrastructure and service includes health care, housing, community center, and library.

** Change in leadership includes either individual growth or increased activity, or increased mutual support and/or consultation among cohort members.

In conclusion, results show that in half of all the surveys, the respondent indicated in at least one of their responses that something in the community had changed to strengthen community leadership. It is not surprising that this is the dimension of healthy community showing the greatest impact, since this is the primary focus of the BCLP and BRCLP training. The results show that alumni report the most effort in the dimension of economic opportunity – or at least, that is the dimension that is most salient for them when they are asked to name an example. This indicates that the Blandin Foundation’s vision of “healthy rural communities grounded in strong economies” is being widely addressed by a substantial proportion of its leadership program alumni. All of the other dimensions are also being addressed by at least some alumni in their work in the community, although the dimension of safety and security is least often mentioned.