



ORTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION

J. MARION SIMS
Foundation

FAQ COMMUNITY HEART & SOUL®

What is Community Heart & Soul?

Community Heart & Soul is a catalyst for positive change in small cities and towns. By actively seeking the collective wisdom of all residents, including those whose voices are often missing, Community Heart & Soul brings people together to build stronger, healthier, and more economically vibrant communities. This resident-driven method takes into account both the unique character of a town and the deep emotional connection of the people who live there – a town’s “Heart & Soul®.” These collective insights into what truly matters most serve to guide the town in making the best decisions about its future.

Why does Community Heart & Soul matter to the community?

Communities are at their best when all residents have a say in their future, and when they experience the benefits of working together toward common goals grounded in their emotional connection to a place. This approach touches real people, solves real problems, improves quality of life, and results in stronger communities.

What has Community Heart & Soul accomplished for other towns?

Towns have used Community Heart & Soul in several ways. Some have gathered broad input before writing or rewriting a comprehensive plan. Others have used the model to spark revitalization. Three neighboring towns in Colorado used Community Heart & Soul to guide plans for building a sustainable economy. Many have discovered that Community Heart & Soul serves their towns by leaving a framework that helps overcome challenges and solve problems well beyond the close of a specific project.

How does Community Heart & Soul work?

Community Heart & Soul happens in four distinct phases. The overall project is built into four phases encompassing specific learning, capacity building, or engagement goals.

1. Lay the Groundwork:

Gather partners and a team of volunteers, set goals, and establish what will be included in the project. This is also an important time to find out who lives or works in the community and set up a communications plan to reach them all.

2. Explore Your Community:

Activities in this phase focus on attracting a broad, diverse mix of people to help identify what matters most. Telling personal stories about local experiences is a key engagement strategy in this phase, bringing people together and helping them to find common ground. This phase ends with the articulation of that common ground in Heart & Soul Statements, which guide activities and results in phases 3 and 4.

3. Make Decisions:

In this phase, the community's Heart & Soul Statements provide a framework for developing solutions and alternatives and then evaluating them. As many people as possible are included in decision-making aiming for broad and meaningful participation in developing and evaluating options.

4. Take Action:

Creating a Stewardship Team is an important part of this phase. This leadership team coordinates the work and communicates progress to keep community members engaged and decision-makers accountable. This team also finds ways to infuse civic culture and local government with the town's adopted Heart & Soul Statements and the three Heart & Soul Principles. This phase focuses on the transition to sustained long-term implementation.

Why is the J. Marion Sims Foundation investing in the Community Heart & Soul method?

The J. Marion Sims Foundation is partnering with the Orton Family Foundation to share the Community Heart & Soul model as part of its ongoing commitment to lift up and empower community voices to support a healthy community. The Foundation intends to deepen dialogue within our communities, so as to strengthen and support the kind of collaboration that builds capacity in our towns and cities. With the insights gained through this and other community engagement processes, the Foundation will use community data and indicators to make decisions, measure progress, and illuminate issues that are important to those who live, learn, work, or play here.

What is the role of the J. Marion Sims Foundation?

The J. Marion Sims Foundation will work with the Orton Family Foundation to review applications from towns wanting to conduct a Community Heart & Soul project and to select a limited number of communities to receive grant funds to hire a coordinator for the two-year projects. The two foundations will provide community coaches, training, and technical assistance to guide and support community engagement activities.

How will communities be chosen to participate in Community Heart & Soul?

The J. Marion Sims Foundation will support a limited number of interested communities in this process, selected through a competitive proposal process. Interested community leaders are required to attend an informational workshop and submit a Request For Proposal (RFP).

What does this mean for other towns that are not going to implement Community Heart & Soul at this time?

The J. Marion Sims Foundation is committed to hearing the voices of community members throughout its footprint and will continue engagement activities in all communities, including those who do not choose to apply for the Community Heart& Soul method, or those who are not selected for funding in 2017.

What is the timeline and process for submitting a proposal?

The J. Marion Sims Foundation will continue to provide opportunities to answer the community's questions about the Community Heart & Soul model, including a workshop in May 2017. All interested towns must send a representative to the May workshop. A more detailed timeline will be released in May.

Why is including everyone and getting their stories so important to Community Heart & Soul?

Broad—and deep—engagement with community members is a fundamental building block of a successful Community Heart & Soul project. Resident-driven engagement makes all the difference in building stronger communities; the impact is lasting in the trust it builds, the ideas it sparks, and the new connections it creates.

What is the Orton Family Foundation?

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