



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Recognize Your Successes!

By CED Guest Author

Article: <https://ced.sog.unc.edu/recognize-your-successes/>

This entry was posted on March 10, 2011 and is filed under Community Development, Community-Campus Partnership, Human & Cultural Assets, Social & Civic Assets

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We all wish for that single magnificent opportunity to transform our lives or our communities for the better, forever. In economic development, that might equate to attracting a company that will hire many employees or to receiving a substantial grant that enables the rejuvenation of a neighborhood. Those dramatic immediate achievements do happen sometimes, but more than likely positive change happens through small steps taken in the same direction by many people over a period of time.

Public servants often stay in a state of reaction, responding to the ever-changing challenges of the day. Sometimes we do work in a proactive or thoughtful mode, such as when engaging in strategic planning. Rarely, though, do we make the effort to recognize and celebrate our every day accomplishments. We are just too busy to make time to do so!

Here is a simple strategy for honoring those small successes: Ask positive questions. Questions create attention and focus us. They are our most readily available and powerful tool to change our circumstances, our conversations, and our stories.

In your next staff or committee meeting, instead of going around the table to have people provide updates or just launching into the topic of discussion, pose a single question that will reveal moments of excellence or accomplishment:

- When a community is economically stressed: *Tell us about an act of kindness or compassion you witnessed in the last month among our staff or clients.*
- When an organization has been working in overload: *Describe a recent incident or interaction that reminded you why our work is so important to our community.*
- When a community is trying to generate a successful future: *What is one new good thing that has happened in our business community over the last year?*
- When people are trying to do more with less: *Give an example of generous or creative problem-solving you witnessed.*

Don't stop there. Once everyone has a chance to share an experience, take a moment to debrief.

- What do these comments tell us about our staff, organization, or community?
- What (often hidden) strengths do we have?
- How can these serve us in building stronger relationships, services, or products?
- How can we remain more conscious of our strengths and accomplishments?

People will find what they are looking for: indicators of success or failure, creative solutions or passive endurance, excellence or mediocrity. Use your meeting agendas to rediscover, organize, and celebrate the good and the strong rather than focusing solely on problems.

For more information on the Public Intersection Project, contact Margaret at margaret@sog.unc.edu.