

IMPACT AR

INDEPENDENCE COUNTY



IMPACT Independence County

The story of a positive community improvement process
and the local residents and stakeholders who drive it.

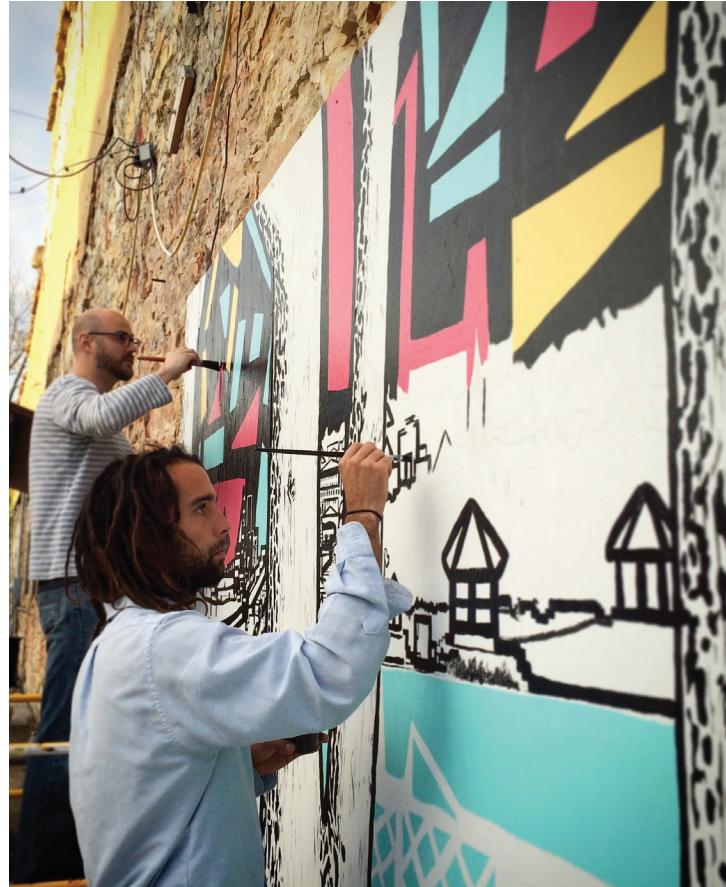




"...a stronger, more cohesive Independence County."

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“Before IMPACT, the community vibe was us versus them. IMPACT led the way for the community to come together under a common shared vision, and realize we all want similar things. There’s a level of unity in the community now that simply did not exist before.”

Every good story has a main theme as well as supportive underlying themes that make it meaningful. This is true regarding the ongoing story of IMPACT Independence County, a strategic planning initiative involving residents and stakeholders from each community in the county including the county seat of Batesville, Arkansas. The main theme of IMPACT’s story concerns the power residents possess to improve their communities once they become engaged and strategically aligned under a common vision. The overall themes of “collective action” in the IMPACT process are:

- 1 A common agenda**
- 2 Broad support**
- 3 Diversity**
- 4 Transparency**
- 5 Inclusion**
- 6 Individual commitments**
- 7 Coordination, cooperation, partnerships**
- 8 Lasting improvements**

INTRODUCING IMPACT

This documentation will touch on each of these points in the context of how they illuminate and reinforce the primary theme that, once mobilized to work in concert, local residents and stakeholders of Independence County are significantly impacting the quality of life in their community; favorably influencing public policies, programs and practices; and leveraging their successes to gain needed resources.

LAUNCHING IMPACT

When Crystal Johnson moved to Batesville and took on the role of President/CEO, Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce, she was determined to make a positive difference in her new home. She saw great potential for the area to grow and prosper but her research revealed that its population had remained stagnant for many years and that there was a palpable "us versus them" attitude within the diverse sectors of the county that stood in the way of progress. This mindset was most notably evident in the lack of cooperation between the interests of Batesville residents and stakeholders and the interests of those in the area outside of Batesville proper. Under Johnson's leadership, the Chamber's Board of Directors agreed that the Chamber was in a good position to take on the task of **unified community development** and to assume a guiding role on this issue.

Around this time, Johnson recruited Jamie Rayford to join the Chamber as Chief Operating Officer. Johnson, the IMPACT steering committee, and Rayford shared the view that for any community development effort to be successful it must sprout from the grassroots. To get started, the Chamber asked Lyon College and the University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville (UACCB) to join them

as the lead partners in a broad-based community movement to greatly impact the quality of life in Independence County. They acknowledged upfront that building consensus among a community regarding its future, especially if the intent is to take a grassroots approach, can be complicated and rigorous.

"We agreed that it had to be a very intentional and careful process," says Johnson. **"We needed a big outreach effort in order to engage a broad range of individuals and groups.** We needed a large enough base of public support to influence countywide decision-makers and policy makers to listen to and act upon the public's wants and needs."

Over a six-month period, bridging the end of 2014 and the first half of 2015, the IMPACT steering committee worked on developing a marketing strategy for how to most effectively build public awareness, understanding, acceptance, and support of the process they were creatively constructing. In addition to Johnson and Rayford, the committee was made-up of the following community leaders: Phil Baldwin (Citizens Bank), Debbie Frazier (UACCB), Robb Roberts (First Community Bank), Dr. Donald Weatherman (Lyon College), Karen Ryan (Vital Link), and Vonda Halford (TWH Enterprises).



These leaders, along with many others who were consulted and gave input, endorsed the conviction of IMPACT's partners that the voice of the people had to drive the process rather than just the voices of businesses or politicians. **An important shared belief of IMPACT's partners and leaders is that the residents of Independence County have a right to strive to create the environment that they desire.** This, they felt, would truly make IMPACT the community's plan. According to Jennifer Daniels, Ph.D., assistant professor at Lyon College, "Our intent was not to tell people what needed to be done. It was to ask people what opportunities we should pursue to improve life in our county — as well as what opportunities they were willing to become actively engaged in pursuing."

The steering committee worked together to develop a survey to present to residents and stakeholders of Independence County at a community gathering that was planned for July 1, 2015. Months prior to this with the help of the Chamber's staff and volunteers, the leadership team settled on "IMPACT" as the name for its community development process. They also chose a bold logo with capital letters using the word "impact" which they felt could be viewed as both a strong action verb and an end result.

In addition to agreeing on a name and logo, the steering committee created a survey to introduce publicly at the July 2015 community meeting. It was a simple, straightforward survey that asked respondents to pick from an extensive list of topics that were most important to them when thinking about their quality of life in Independence County. Respondents then were asked to rank the top five topics that were most important to them personally.

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In advance of the community meeting, the IMPACT steering committee reached out across the county to strengthen existing relationships and to form new ones with the goal of building support for the IMPACT launch. At the same time, Rayford and Chamber staff spearheaded a formal communications effort to inform the public about the community meeting. They used traditional and social media outlets to invite the public to the community meeting at UACCB. Rack cards, banners, signs, as well as stickers for children were distributed. Ads on Facebook and Twitter were also used.

The careful preparation for the initial community meeting paid off in significant ways. Over 300 residents and stakeholders from all over the county attended as did many local and state dignitaries including Governor Asa Hutchinson who lauded the IMPACT process and the volunteers who are working hard to ensure its success.

Attendees overwhelmingly welcomed the opportunity to give input. The surveys were first distributed at the meeting in English and Spanish and then as a follow-up were

broadly disseminated to an array of venues throughout the entire county — every place from schools to gas stations to retail outlets to work sites. To collect even more input, civic groups and community volunteers spoke with visitors to the Independence County Fair and to parents at school open houses. A cross section of people completed the survey including young children who submitted drawings illustrating their thoughts about IMPACT that the local newspaper published. **In total, more than 1,200 responses to the survey were received, reviewed and analyzed.** Staff spent additional time talking with Lyon College and UACCB students to gather and incorporate their interests into the planning effort.

Once analyzed by the IMPACT steering committee, input from the completed surveys indicated that 25 topic areas should be included in the IMPACT plan. Those topics fit logically into four groupings which ultimately evolved into the following four subcommittees:

- 1 Economic Prosperity**
- 2 Tourism**
- 3 Educational Excellence**
- 4 Healthy Living and Wellbeing**

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

After the results were analyzed and released to the public, residents and stakeholders were invited to volunteer to serve on the subcommittees of their choosing. Chairpersons were selected for each subcommittee. Two to four co-chairpersons were chosen for each of the subcommittees. The IMPACT steering committee recommended people to serve as the chairpersons. Chairpersons

were selected for their ability to organize information and on being demographically representative of the diverse mix of people who populate Independence County. The Chamber had liaisons on each subcommittee and created agendas for the meetings while also performing administrative tasks so that the IMPACT volunteers did not become overburdened.

These subcommittees met frequently from September 2015 to December. All meetings were open to the public and all attendees became subcommittee members who were eligible to vote as part of the decision-making process. The four subcommittees operated separately and were loosely organized around a common agenda. They each were charged with developing specific strategic goals and action steps for bringing these goals to life in the community. The structure provided by the subcommittees' goals and action steps instilled a sense of personal accountability among individual members. This is largely due to the fact that everyone's ideas were considered for inclusion into each subcommittee's final plan. The leadership team over a six-month period molded the four subcommittee plans into a comprehensive, countywide IMPACT plan that was published in May 2016. The plan's publication formally marked the beginning of IMPACT's first implementation stage (from 2016 to 2020), for which the Chamber, with the support of co-chairs, has taken responsibility for organizing people and groups around full implementation of objectives and goals.

As the subcommittees started to develop their goals, they were encouraged by Phil Baldwin, steering committee member and President/CEO of Citizens Bank, to "dream big" and to not get bogged down in the planning phase on funding or political issues. He felt it was important to start the

process in the right way and that if a solid plan was developed, which the majority of the public endorsed, then the necessary political and financial forces could be harnessed down the road.

According to Baldwin, "We wanted to make a big lifestyle difference throughout the county and not just to focus on businesses as other Chambers often do. Because we had engaged so many young people who have since taken a leadership role in the IMPACT process, we have the opportunity to look forward to a sustained set of activities with the potential to garner the resources we require to fulfill our plans and to have a large impact on people's lives over many years."

Carter Ford, the 2017 chairman of the Chamber's Board and co-chairperson representative of tourism on the IMPACT steering committee, says he became involved with IMPACT because of its inclusiveness. "All segments of the county's population took part. We have a lot of millennials living here and I was especially pleased to see so many of them volunteer and assume leadership roles."

While identifying and agreeing upon the subcommittees' strategic goals was grueling and painstaking work, **the spirit of compromise and cooperation was much stronger than the conflicts and differences of opinion that inevitably emerged throughout the process.**

People generally felt good about working out problems together with others whom they did not normally interact. They seem to take pride in being part of a process that emphasizes the similarities between people rather than their differences.

Rayford feels that observing the subcommittees' members address conflicts and find mutually acceptable solutions was invaluable learning for her as a leader of the IMPACT work. "The most progress and biggest breakthroughs occurred when conflicts were directly and transparently addressed. Of course, not every difference of opinion was resolved to everyone's complete satisfaction, but the volunteers generally found ways to be able to continue working together productively, and to make progress toward stitching together the pieces of the big picture — **a stronger, more cohesive Independence County.**"

It took considerable work over three months for the subcommittees to reach consensus on their strategic goals. Yet even more challenging work was involved in identifying the action steps that should be taken to bring the strategic goals to fruition.

"I think the toughest part of the subcommittees' work was and still is establishing and figuring out how to carry out the action steps," says Johnson. "In fact, there continues to be considerable debate over questions such as what action steps should next be taken, how should they be implemented, who should be responsible and accountable for making each action step happen, and how will successful implementation be measured."

To help address these difficult questions faced by the subcommittees, the Chamber agreed to provide technical and professional support services for the foreseeable future. The Chamber's Board and staff connects with the community entities whose cooperation is needed to implement the action steps specified by IMPACT's subcommittees.



IMPACT'S STRUCTURE: FOUR SUBCOMMITTEES AND A STEERING COMMITTEE

Essentially, the members of the four subcommittees, who are Independence County residents and stakeholders, drive the IMPACT process. There is also a steering committee that oversees the implementation work carried out by residents and organizations under the direction of the change agent, in this case, The Chamber. The steering committee is chaired by the leader of each convening organization (Lyon College, UACCB, Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce). Its other members include support staff from the convening organizations and at least one co-chair from each subcommittee. The self-perpetuating steering committee appoints its own committee members.

The four subcommittees individually identified between five and ten strategic goals, each of which was accompanied by the action steps needed to progress toward achieving the goals. The goals and action steps became incorporated into IMPACT's master plan with a significant amount of technical and professional assistance from the steering committee.

The subcommittees proceeded on similar but separate tracks between September 1 and November 30, 2015, the time during which the goals and action steps were developed. On average, each subcommittee meeting attracted 15 to 40 participants. Every participant was encouraged to state his or her opinion on all matters under consideration. This proved to be an extremely positive aspect of the meetings. In time, even the quietest, youngest and least civically engaged participants became outspoken members of their subcommittees. The often stated foundational belief supporting IMPACT is that our residents have a right to strive to create the environment that they desire. This concept registered in meaningful ways with most participants. As a guiding principle it also was instrumental in capturing the wide diversity of viewpoints that ultimately became part of the IMPACT master plan published in June 2016.

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During the transition from the period in 2015 when the plan was being developed to the implementation phase in 2016 to present there has been varying levels of progress by the individual subcommittees. Maintaining the momentum and energy that kept volunteers engaged during the planning phase has been a challenge to varying degrees within the subcommittees. Generating the participation of more than 300 people at the initial community meeting has been a positive factor in keeping the number of volunteers who remained engaged throughout the planning stage into the action stage. It also provided a core of people who could be called upon to join the subcommittees and provide input as participation decreased.

Not unexpectedly, there has been a drop-off in volunteer participation despite the best efforts of the Chamber's staff to publicize and promote the work and early accomplishments of the IMPACT team and to recruit new volunteers. The consistent marketing of the IMPACT process is an ongoing challenge for the Chamber staff due to a limited promotional budget and the mere demands of IMPACT-related work. Until its communications capacities can be

increased through the availability of more resources, the Chamber continues to do its best to get coverage of IMPACT's work in the local paper, to send out social media missives and to encourage volunteers, friends, partners, and community leaders throughout the county to spread word about IMPACT and how it is improving the quality of life in Independence County.

It is crucial to IMPACT's sustained success to be as strategic as possible about maintaining momentum while elements of the policy are being implemented.

As Johnson says: "We at the Chamber can take a lot of the weight off the shoulders of the IMPACT subcommittee members regarding implementation. While our role is not to develop and run programs for IMPACT, we can and do play a significant role in helping create the right conditions for individuals and public and private entities to come together and achieve the outcomes IMPACT envisions. We can encourage entities to take advantage of available resources like we have with the mini-grants for the Melba Theater revitalization, The Pinto restaurant, and Independence County Library. We can build relationships such as those we've established with our city mayors and councils, school leadership, and business owners. These relationships have been helpful in forming the partnerships and collaborations responsible for implementing a tax for bolstering tourism, advancing the Main Street streetscape project, bringing free wireless Internet access to the Main Street area, and hosting a county-wide education summit which has resulted in monumental changes at each of our school districts in the county."

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SUBCOMMITTEE

The Independence County residents and stakeholders participating in the economic prosperity subcommittee focused on aligning the county's many and varied economic development generators. These economic drivers reside in the realms of business and industry, agriculture, technology, education, transportation, geography, and demographics. There's plenty of room for economic growth in each of these individual areas; however, the subcommittee members were most interested in pursuing opportunities that will impact all sectors rather than just any individual sector of the economy. The Economic Prosperity subcommittee was and remains interested in pursuing opportunities and goals that will have a broad, significantly positive collective impact on the entire economy of Independence County.

"We wanted to get all sectors of Independence County pulling together toward a broad common vision," says Robb Roberts, President/CEO of First Community Bank and co-chair of IMPACT's Economic Prosperity Subcommittee. "This includes public and private entities. To make a big, lasting and meaningful improvement for the wellbeing of people, groups and organizations in this county,

we need to eliminate fragmentation and advance cohesiveness. There are a lot of good things going on in Batesville and county-wide but they are not always aligned to the maximum degree with the greater good of the overall county."

The county has never had a sustained economic development effort. Years ago there was a modest economic development tax but it was not renewed. It has been a struggle to get various organizations to work together even though there was general agreement that this is what is needed.

Members of the Economic Prosperity Subcommittee tackled the issue of fragmentation straight on. The subcommittee's general approach to establishing its goals revolved around the pragmatic idea of joining together the varied and often overlapping aspects of the local economy under one economic development organization.

Strategic Goal #1 for the subcommittee is to "develop a unified economic development structure for Independence County by merging current economic development organizations to form a singular, countywide organization." The first step toward this goal began in the first quarter of 2017, and after substantial conversations among all affected parties,



the merging of the county's five economic development organizations was completed in October of 2017. The four entities are Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce, Chamber Foundation, Independence County Economic Development Commission, and Batesville-Independence County Industrial Development, Inc. The name of the newly merged organization will be Batesville Area Alliance (the "Alliance").

Other key actions taken by the economic prosperity subcommittee in 2017, besides finalizing the merger of the county's existing public/private economic development entities, include the following concrete steps:

1 Create a county-wide Business After Hours program that rotates program hosting between all communities in Independence County.

The Business After Hours Program will be restructured as large public gatherings with street parties, live bands, art shows, and more. The programs will have offerings for all age groups with a special focus on college students and young families.

2 Evaluate the feasibility of an Independence Promise program modeled after successful programs in other Arkansas communities.

IMPACT's program intends to provide financial support to high school juniors and seniors who qualify to attend college or workforce development training programs at either Lyon College or UACCB.

3 Pilot a small business incubator program to support entrepreneurial and start-up businesses.

Overall the subcommittee identified a total of 10 economic development goals that it plans to help make happen during the next several years. These goals each have been developed by the subcommittee members with an eye toward creating the kind of synergy that's needed among the county's diverse economic sectors in order to stimulate sustainable job and population growth. The subcommittee's efforts will focus on supporting expansion of Lyon College and UACCB; promoting downtown redevelopment for main streets in all Independence County communities; creating master plan retirement community concepts and infrastructure; and developing a formal infrastructure blueprint to attract new technology-based entrepreneurial businesses and start-up organizations.

TOURISM SUBCOMMITTEE

Unlike many community change efforts that at first struggle to engage grassroots support and to overcome public skepticism about being able to make a real difference, **IMPACT's efforts to strengthen tourism in Independence County were enthusiastically welcomed from the start.**

Thanks to an effective marketing effort, people from all over the county with a stake in tourism volunteered to become involved. According to Carter Ford, IMPACT's ambitious process of strengthening and broadening the tourism industry was framed in the first meeting of the tourism subcommittee. Initial enthusiasm among members was buoyed by the subcommittee's openness to all ideas for improving tourism countywide and the assurance that all viable ideas would become part of the final plan. This proved to be the case.



Among the four subcommittees, the tourism subcommittee made perhaps the smoothest transition from the planning phase to implementation. During the planning phase, subcommittee members met every other week and they were encouraged to stay involved with the help of the Chamber. Now in the implementation stage, the subcommittee meets regularly. Cathy Drew of the Ozark Gateway Region says the Chamber "helped us start the planning process and helped us to keep it moving forward. But it's important to note that our subcommittee's plan is not the Chamber's plan. It's the community's plan."

In formalizing its strategic goals and action steps, the subcommittee gathered a great deal of data. Drew adds that, "The state's Department of Parks and Tourism provided us with a lot of good county-specific data that helped us develop plans that build upon existing strengths and that address existing weaknesses."

A central reason why the tourism subcommittee was able to maintain momentum during the transition to the implementation phase is that members began early on to see key elements of its plan come to fruition. **Most noteworthy is the significant progress made toward the goal of establishing an Advertising and Promotion Commission.** The subcommittee gained support from a broad swath of people from across the county to join in advocating to the city council for an advertising and promotions tax to sustain the tourism program.

The subcommittee helped create a formal arm, the Advertising and Promotions Commission (A&P Commission), to bolster its advocacy efforts. It is composed of representatives of hotels, restaurants and the city council. It was formalized after the subcommittee went to city council with a large number of its enthusiastic supporters, many of whom were entities vital to tourism in the county, to ask for a vote in favor of a tourism tax. This broad showing of public support influenced the city council to vote in unanimous favor for the tax. The new tax sustained the hiring of a full-time tourism director and the establishment of the A&P Commission that will operate as a division of the Batesville Area Alliance.



Other important aspects of the subcommittee's work that began in 2016 and are still underway include:

- 1 Ensuring a high-speed wireless umbrella** that covers Historic Downtown Batesville to attract technology-related business.
- 2 Finishing current streetscape work** with the installation of historically accurate street lighting throughout the downtown area and by emphasizing landscape amenities through wayfinding and distinctive signage that celebrates the historical context of downtown.
- 3 Relocating the Independence County Library** to the Barnett Building and expanding the library's technology capabilities to create 21st century relevance. Additionally, efforts are underway to develop the library into a community center that hosts special community events, activities, and civic/business functions.
- 4 Completing renovations to the Melba Theater.**
- 5 Assessing all meeting venues, hotel spaces, and sports complexes** to determine capacity to host significant tourism-related events. Based on the results of the inventory, prepare a comprehensive report on the findings and develop a detailed plan to address challenges identified in the report.
- 6 The A&P Commission will oversee** the tourism director in a comprehensive re-branding and marketing effort of Independence County to the state, region, and nation.

Beyond 2017, the tourism subcommittee expects to play an advisory role in executing the continued development of the White River waterfront area; promoting Independence County as an outdoor recreation destination and tourism hub for North Central Arkansas; creating monthly festival/tourist events; and gaining national exposure as a desirable retirement community.

There have already been impressive accomplishments resulting from the subcommittee's work and there are ambitious, highly achievable future plans on the table. But it hasn't been smooth sailing throughout. Many challenges had to be overcome and many conflicts between people and organizations had to be resolved. The Chamber helped out a lot in this regard. One example of a conflict that was resolved favorably concerned Main Street Batesville. The Main Street Batesville organization felt IMPACT's goals for downtown had the potential to usurp their role in planning and implementing the organization's vision for downtown. They were also concerned that IMPACT's interests in the project might draw funds from the same resource pool they hoped to draw upon. As it turned out, with the Chamber's help, conversations were convened that focused on the areas of shared interest. Keeping an eye on the best interests of the greater community, these conversations paved the way for clarifying the specific roles that each group could play in an effective and efficient Main Street transformation process that was owned by multiple entities.

EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE SUBCOMMITTEE

Developing the educational excellence subcommittee's strategic goals and action steps was not easy, but it was a piece of cake compared to the challenge of systematically implementing them across the broad spectrum of Independence County's six different school systems and its various levels of education from pre-school to higher education.

Subcommittee members recognized the complexities of influencing different educational entities in a uniform manner. Different educational entities and their communities have different priorities with different wants and needs as well as different strengths and weaknesses. The subcommittee members agreed that despite these differences there exists an opportunity for the county's educational entities to channel their uniqueness to lead continuous improvement efforts that will result in a shared goal: preparing every student for a career or higher education.

"...the volunteers found ways to continue working together productively, head in the same direction, and make progress toward stitching together the pieces of the big picture - a stronger, more cohesive Independence County."

The subcommittee also wisely acknowledged that making this happen would be a long-term proposition and the process would fail if it were overly prescriptive. Instead, the general view of the members was to start slowly by first bringing together superintendents, principals, college leaders, and workforce trainers from each community in the county. Secondly, rather than telling them what they could do to advance the IMPACT process, they were asked what they were now doing that would be in sync with the broad goal of preparing a well-educated and trained countywide workforce that is able to succeed in a college or career of their choice. The subcommittee felt that getting all educational entities committed to acknowledging the specifics of a shared goal would help directionally align their day to day practices with desired results. Even though they might take different tracks, this is a significant step forward for the varied educational resources that exist in Independence County.

Independence County's educational environment is relatively progressive and widely varied. The self-interest of individual educational constituents within some communities in the county has at times impeded the adoption of innovative programs, practices and policies across the entire county. This, along with a population that like the rest of Arkansas has not grown for years, contributed to the creation of unhealthy competition among educational institutions, especially regarding the competition for funding. This was particularly true regarding competition between Batesville and its surrounding communities. The only clear-cut areas of shared interest across the entire county concerned increasing funding for childcare and early childhood education as well as for access to broadband.



To address the county's overall educational situation as described here, the subcommittee felt the imperative to reinvigorate the inactive Batesville Independence County Public Education Foundation. This was a county-wide foundation that became largely ineffective, due to lack of focus in the often broad realm of education. The subcommittee collectively agreed that its first goal should be to establish a new foundation that would convene educational leaders in the county and help them to holistically pursue opportunities, build upon best practices and address challenges regarding issues such as resource shortages. The first goal the subcommittee established is to:

Create the Independence County Educational Foundation with the mission to advance public education imperatives throughout the county and to organize a process through which local businesses, institutions of higher education, and the public education system can coordinate educational efforts and programs.

The action steps implemented in 2017 under the direction of the Chamber to further this goal include the following three efforts:

- 1** In conjunction with the educational leadership of Independence County (school district superintendents and college presidents), **establish an educational foundation with a 501(c)(3) nonprofit designation.**
- 2** **Develop the educational foundation's charter** and define specific operational responsibilities and elect a chairman and determine frequency of meetings.
- 3** **The educational foundation will integrate educational and business needs/responsibilities and coordinate joint efforts to align public schools, colleges, and the business community.**
This public education system will be designed to ensure students graduating from high school have the skills they need to succeed in college with limited need for remediation. In like manner, the colleges will ensure their graduates have the skills needed by business/industry to create an acceptable workforce.

Another key activity that took place in 2017 was to develop for businesses and industries in Independence County a highly trained labor force by developing a state-of-the-art workforce-training center and offering engineering programs in area high schools. This will involve performing a feasibility analysis for developing a high-quality workforce-training center on the UACCB campus. The training center's primary purpose will be to train students to support local industry so graduates of the program will be able to move directly into local industrial jobs without the need for business organizations to invest in training or retraining graduates.

In October of 2016, Independence County was named a ForwARd Arkansas community. The statewide ForwARd Arkansas initiative is a partnership of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, and Arkansas State Board of Education. ForwARd Arkansas's goal is to help every Arkansas student be prepared for success in college and the workplace. The year 2017 marked a host of opportunities, educational partnerships, and progress supported heavily by the credibility that working with ForwARd Arkansas brought the educational excellence subcommittee and the Chamber. Key activities that began in 2017 and have been completed or are still in progress are:

- 1 Meet with major industrial employers in Independence County to discuss local issues and challenges relating to workforce attraction and retention.
- 2 Target teacher salaries to be in the top quartile of state salaries, through both base pay and incentive compensation programs.
- 3 Improve test scores in math, science, and literacy by at least 25% in all Independence County schools.
- 4 Increase parental involvement in school activities.

- 5 Develop an aggressive program of language education for ESL families.
- 6 Evaluate the feasibility of an Independence County promise.
- 7 Expand existing quality programs within the county's school districts with the help of public and private partners to the maximum capacity needed and support programs unable to solely support infant and toddler care.

In the third quarter of 2017, the Batesville Independence County Public Education Foundation welcomed all co-chairs of the educational excellence subcommittee to become members of the board. They took steps to document how their mission needed to evolve and amended their governing documents to reflect an updated mission to support the educational work of the IMPACT strategic plan.

In the future, the board will use its mission to contribute to the success of Independence County by providing innovative education models characterized by competitive work skills training, personalized learning, and partnerships with business and industry.

HEALTHY LIVING AND WELLBEING SUBCOMMITTEE

Like the other three subcommittees, the healthy living and wellbeing subcommittee went through the process of developing goals and action steps September 1 to November 30, 2015. Unlike the other subcommittees, once the goals and action steps were developed, the original members of the subcommittee stopped actively participating. Before the IMPACT strategic plan was even published in June 2016, the subcommittee lost momentum almost entirely. After taking time to reflect on this, the steering committee felt that part of the reason momentum was not maintained was an imbalance in

the composition of the committee. The subcommittee was mostly made up of residents with a desire to give input and voice frustrations. In comparison, the other three subcommittees were a balance of residents and those affiliated in some way with their systems (i.e. tourism business, educational institution or school, etc.). The steering committee notes that there was very little involvement from the healthcare sector.

Recently with the engagement of new chamber board members from White River Medical Center, a progressive hospital and medical center serving North Central Arkansas, new ideas and direction are starting to emerge about the role of a new subcommittee.

The subcommittee is now concentrating its efforts on coordinating healthy living and wellbeing summit goals for more positive, comprehensive results.

To start, the subcommittee plans to convene a 2018 healthy living and wellbeing summit in order to bring together organizations whose missions align with IMPACT healthy living and wellbeing goals.

Despite the lack of a subcommittee, the Chamber was still able to coordinate and collaborate action and provide support to organizations that delivered significant results in the area of healthy living and wellbeing. Activities underway at the end of 2016 and completed in 2017 were:

- 1 Generate** community support for further development of the Greenway Trail to secure trail routes.
- 2 Develop** a comprehensive trail system plan for Independence County.
- 3 Ensure** municipal and county regulations to proactively support the development or installment of transportation companies such as private cab services or UBER throughout the county.





GAUGING IMPACT'S PROGRESS

As stated earlier in this report, bringing about community change driven by a grassroots effort can be a complicated and rigorous process. It takes the engagement of a lot of residents and stakeholders. It takes a commitment to listen and respond to the voices of the people. It takes focusing on community strengths and on similarities rather than differences between people. It requires a sustained effort on many levels including communications, technical support for volunteers, resource development, and relationship building. And all of this must result in positive community-wide outcomes.

The IMPACT Independence County process fits this description well. Getting and keeping large numbers of people involved has taken a great deal of work. This is apparent from the very first community meeting two years ago that attracted 300 plus attendees, the many subcommittee meetings since then and the constant interaction with economic, tourism, educational, and healthcare organizations across the county. The fact that the subcommittees and the steering committee have lived by the credo that every voice counts has gained the trust and support of volunteers. The volunteers view IMPACT as their community change process — not the convening partners' process or plan, not the Chamber's and not local government nor businesses. The enthusiasm and collective voice of the people of Independence County has gained awareness, understanding, acceptance, and support for IMPACT's advocacy for favorable and lasting changes.

To date, IMPACT-related efforts have resulted in several tangible and measurable outcomes regarding improving community-wide wellbeing, influencing county decision makers from the public and private sectors, and leveraging financial and political resources.

Examples of these outcomes include IMPACT's role in the issuance of mini grants and bank loans to Melba Theater, The Pinto restaurant, and Independence County Library. Support from IMPACT also helped facilitate the creation of an Advertising and Promotion Commission, the development of a downtown park, the funding of a Tourism Program and Director, the Main Street streetscape project, free wireless Internet throughout Main Street, and the expansion of the concurrent credit education program, which brought college courses and career certificates to Batesville and Southside High School students. In the areas of economic development, tourism, education and health care, IMPACT's subcommittees have significantly influenced the development of singular, unified structures that promise to bring more countywide cohesiveness and coordination of resources.

Despite the accomplishments mentioned here, and the many more planned to occur in the next few years, IMPACT's greatest accomplishment of all is the

bringing together of the county's residents and stakeholders to make Independence County a better place for individuals, families, groups, organizations, and businesses. It has elevated civic engagement by demonstrating what different people working together with common goals can make happen.

Crystal Johnson says, "Before IMPACT, the community vibe was us versus them. IMPACT led the way for the community to come together under a common shared vision, and realize we all want similar things." She continues by citing the important work IMPACT volunteers have done in creating networks of cooperation, consolidating resources and creating cost-saving infrastructures. **"There's a level of unity in the community now that simply did not exist before."**

In the coming years, IMPACT intends to build upon both its tangible successes and on the values that underlie the success of its process — building a social network to engage at the grassroots level and lift up underrepresented voices. Another future emphasis will be to negotiate ongoing challenges such as getting IMPACT's messages out to more residents and stakeholders on a consistent basis. More people, especially minorities, must continually be engaged.





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