

Heart & Soul Community Planning Winners Announced

Small towns to embark on groundbreaking two-year citizen-driven community planning projects

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MIDDLEBURY, VT— The [Orton Family Foundation](#) today selected five communities for the second phase of its \$10M five-year [Heart & Soul Community Planning](#) initiative to change the way small cities and towns engage their citizens and plan for the future.

Each of the following applicants has been awarded \$100,000 over two years along with Foundation staff support, tools, trainings and other resources to attain their goals:

- Cortez, Colorado (pop. 8,482)
- Essex Town & Essex Junction, Vermont (combined pop. 19,587)
- Gardiner, Maine (pop. 6,100)
- North Fork Valley (towns of Paonia, Hotchkiss, and Crawford), Colorado (combined pop. 7,000)
- Polson, Montana (pop. 5,000)

“We were so impressed by the energy in these towns for broad and deep civic engagement and a strong commitment to steering change based on each town’s heart and soul values,” said Bill Roper, President & CEO of the Orton Family Foundation. “Through the challenges each will overcome and the local wisdom each will contribute, these towns will help us build a model for communities all across America.”

The towns exhibited an acute awareness of their issues and demonstrated the desire to shake up the status quo, reinvent their planning processes and chart a course that will place them on a path to vital economic growth. Each town has begun to map their community networks, and volunteers are ready to create new opportunities and enhance the place they call home.

Before work gets underway on the ground in the towns, community leaders and Foundation staff will craft and sign a Partnership Agreement to guide goals and expectations over the two years. Agreements will be complete by early February 2012.

The selection of these towns is the second phase of the Foundation’s five-year \$10 million Heart & Soul Community Planning initiative to unlock citizens’ potential to

meaningfully participate in planning, bridge their differences and affect change. The projects are predicated on building a shared expectation for civic engagement and transparency in local decision-making. Throughout the Heart & Soul process, citizens not only articulate what makes their places special; they also share the responsibility for acting on what they value and stewarding their values-based vision over the long-term. This has been borne out by the Foundation's experience in its first round of Heart & Soul [demonstration projects](#).

The [Orton Family Foundation](#), based in Middlebury, Vermont and Denver, Colorado, seeks to help small cities and towns discover and describe their heart and soul—the collective attributes that make communities unique—and build on those attributes in planning toward a vibrant, enduring future.

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