

# Research & Policy Brief Series

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## CaRDI's Support for Community Economic Development

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### Cornell's Community & Regional Development Institute

Like many land grant universities, Cornell assists communities achieve their economic development goals. Cornell's Community & Regional Development Institute (CaRDI) supports local and regional development through its primary focus on community development. Based in the Department of Development Sociology, CaRDI's programs of applied research and outreach are motivated by a concern for understanding the determinants and consequences of societal development, and a desire to produce knowledge and educational programs that contribute to the alleviation of social problems, while creating opportunities for improved well-being both at the local level and throughout the United States<sup>1</sup>.

CaRDI's programming seeks to build community capacity – the knowledge, skills, attitudes and resources community members need to proactively and collaboratively identify, pursue and achieve their development goals. Since CaRDI's programs are based on empirical research, Cornell's extensive research resources provide the evidence base for most of its information and training services. CaRDI's strong commitment to the University's land grant mission guides its work as a multidisciplinary social science institute, providing the citizens and communities of NYS and nationally with current research-based information and training to promote sustainable community and regional development and well-being. CaRDI's approach to community and economic development is similar to that of many Cooperative Extension programs across the nation, and indeed, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) is a key partner with CaRDI in many efforts. CaRDI's educational programs respond to local needs and opportunities, drawing upon university expertise to provide information, strategies, and relevant education. These programs are developed and often delivered in partnership with local groups – local government, community organizations, individuals and agencies – all of which have a stake in the economic and social future of their communities.

In this brief we discuss the methods and principles which guide CaRDI's work, provide some examples, and explore the challenges and opportunities of these approaches.

### CaRDI's Guiding Principles, Methods & Approaches

CaRDI's information and education programs are guided by the following tenets:

- *A focus on community*
- *Balancing short- and long-term goals*
- *Balancing social, ecological, and economic goals*
- *A commitment to inclusion and democracy*
- *Integrating science-based and experiential knowledge*
- *Understanding that local communities are embedded in regional contexts*
- *Building on a community's existing assets & capacities*
- *Integrating planning and evaluation*

CaRDI uses several methods to approach community development and capacity building - Research, Facilitation, Education, Technical Assistance, and Infrastructure Development.

*Research* – applied social science research examines communities' needs and opportunities, and identifies appropriate research-based development models. For example, utilizing EDA University Center resources, CaRDI worked in collaboration with Pipeline for Progress (a thirteen county workforce development initiative in New York's Southern Tier) and Cornell faculty to assess current industry strengths and economic development opportunities in the region, resulting in the development of a regional action plan.

*Facilitation* – CaRDI collaborates with local, regional, state, and federal level public and private partners, including county-based CCE staff, to design and implement educational and informational projects. For example, CaRDI and the EDA University Center worked with CCE agriculture and nutrition educators to better understand and enhance the ways local and regional foods contribute to community and economic development in Northern NYS<sup>2</sup>.

*Education* – CaRDI, often in partnership with CCE, offers research-based trainings and publications to enhance community leaders' knowledge, skills, and resources that contribute to local and regional development. For example, CaRDI offers the Land

<sup>1</sup> CaRDI is supported by the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, the College of Human Ecology, and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), and is also the host of Cornell's Economic Development Administration (EDA) University Center funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

<sup>2</sup> The North Country Regional Foods Initiative Report is available at: <http://www.nnyagdev.org/nrcf-publications.htm>

Use Leadership Alliance (LULA) training program to increase participants' understanding of NYS land use structure, and to develop key leadership skills useful for managing land use change especially in instances where the choice among alternative uses is controversial.

*Technical Assistance* – CaRDI engages Cornell faculty, CCE educators, and other partners to provide communities with technical assistance to address development needs and opportunities. For example, CaRDI collaborated with the Regional Economic Area Partnership program, Tioga County CCE and the Tioga County Planning and Development Office to develop a leadership training program. CaRDI's role was to present information on understanding and using demographic information, managing land use conflicts, and how to employ key community development process skills.

*Communication/Network Development* – CaRDI helps develop networks to support regular and sustained communication among community members, encouraging long-term shared learning, peer support and collaboration. For example, in Central and Western NY, CaRDI created a network of community and economic developers, legislative officials and other local leaders called The Rural Learning Network (RLN). The network is designed to provide members with a forum for shared learning and peer support on key community development issues via an online list, face to face meetings, and through the social networking tool, NING.

## CaRDI's Training Programs – Specialized Focal Areas

CaRDI offers several trainings as part of its regular program, available to a variety of audiences at the community and regional level. The training programs include:

- *Land Use Training* - CaRDI's land use programming improves understanding of, and decisions about forces that influence the landscape in New York insofar as they involve residents, the communities they live in, and the land (physical and natural environments) that supports and connects them. CaRDI has entered into an exciting new partnership with the Pace University Land Use Law Center to make the Center's Land Use Leadership Alliance (LULA) training widely available beyond its original location in the Hudson Valley. LULA offers four full days of training to a carefully selected and balanced group of local and regional "land use leaders". Participants a) understand the legal foundations and structure of New York State's land use system, b) appreciate the importance and role of collaborative community decision making and conflict management skills in attaining sustainable community development, c) are taught to integrate new legal knowledge with new leadership and process skills, and d) become part of an inter-municipal, regional, and statewide network of similarly trained land use leaders. (See [http://appserv.pace.edu/execute/page.cfm?doc\\_id=23924](http://appserv.pace.edu/execute/page.cfm?doc_id=23924) for a description of the original program as offered by Pace University)
- *Accessing & Using Demographic Information* - Local leaders increasingly need access to socioeconomic and demographic

data for effective planning and grant preparation. The VIEW (Vital Indicators for Enhanced Well-being) website and training program provides a practical approach to thinking about data and indicators, directions to accessing useful data in various subject areas, guidance on how to interpret data and how to use this information strategically for decision-making purposes.

- *Sustainable Community Webinar Series* – This series of webinars provides a web-based opportunity for Extension Educators, local officials and other community leaders to broaden their understanding of current and emerging community and economic development issues and processes. Researchers and practitioners share research-based information and personal experience designed to help local leaders make informed decisions. Some recent webinars include, "Prospects for Fighting Poverty in the 21st Century", "Green Entrepreneurship as an Economic Development Strategy", "Integrated Data System for School and Community Planning", and "Exploring the Green Economy." Sustainable Community webinars are recorded and archived on the CaRDI website for later viewing.
- *Cornell Municipal Clerks Institute* - This Institute is a premium educational opportunity provided by a partnership between the City and Village Clerks and the Town Clerks Associations of the State of New York and CaRDI. City, town, and village clerks, deputy clerks, and clerks of county legislative boards, as well as other municipal officials who seek professional development gain new knowledge and skills to enhance the administration of their office, and contribute to the professionalism of their municipal government. Classes are taught by Cornell University faculty, faculty from other New York State universities, as well as professionals within the Cornell community.

## Challenges and Opportunities in Community Development

New Yorkers are living through a period of remarkable change. Among challenges faced are the restructuring of traditional economic bases, increasing local government costs and demands for services, a global recession, land use changes, and pressures to develop new energy resources in the face of climate change. At the same time, new domestic and global markets are emerging, green technologies represent a growing employment sector, land use planning innovations are taking hold, the local agricultural sector is growing, environmental interests and concerns are influencing policy directions more generally, and communication technologies are bringing people together in new ways. These challenges speak to the need for more fully integrating community development and economic development efforts in the context of broader regional structures, processes and changes. In developing and implementing community and economic development projects, CaRDI's programs seek to enhance outcomes and impacts for the people and communities of New York State.

