LEADERSHIP HANDBOOK: THEORY AND APPROACH FOR BUILDING SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

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FOR BUILDING SOCIA LLY SUS TAINABLE COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

Wildflowers Institute’s theory of change and specific learning processes are designed to accomplish its primary objective: developing sustainable communities. This handbook is designed to assist you in understanding and implementing this objective of the institute. We use metaphors to help us explain our understanding of the community and of our approach to personal and social transformation. For example, the words “wildflowers” and “pollinators” are used to connote the indigenous living systems of a community. We use “lens” and “mirror” to explain a learning process involving personal experiences and reflection. Wildflowers offers a framework and learning process to help communities develop their own identities and understand what is important about each community. As we learn about community cultures, our discussions and actions will have direct consequences in the community.

Senior Wildflowers fellow Ben Davis and Analiese Richard wrote this handbook, which incorporates essential Wildflowers concepts and community development processes. It was developed with the assistance of all Wildflowers fellows and other supportive people at numerous meetings where program design and learning concepts were discussed, tested, and retried. We appreciate the help of Professor Yunxiang Yan as our external evaluator. Senior Wildflowers fellow Kouichoy Saechao of the Lao Iu Mien community assisted in the development of a section of the handbook. Community members participated in various Wildflowers-sponsored events, and fellows engaged in Lao Iu Mien community-building activities. Senior Wildflowers fellow Pablo Lopez of the Red Wolf Band helped us to understand the importance of indigenous spiritual practices and cosmology in building sustainable communities. The fellows’ interest, commitment, and assistance made the development of the handbook a reality, and we are grateful to the following individuals for their contributions: Jah’Shams Abdul-Mu’Min, Ben Ahmad, Tina Alejo, Nolan Arreola, Luis Avelar, Uncle Everett Baldwin, Woody Bitsie, Suzette Bridges, MC Canlas, Anni Chung, Cui Shuqi, Cui Xiaobo, Maggie DeGuzman, Melanie Espinueba, Maryanne Galindo, Jorge Garcia, James Gonzalez, Bernardo Huerta, Ji Fangfang, Jin Chenggang, Michelle Justice, Marcelino Lopez, Curtis Mays, Erik Monje, Krystal Monje, Laura Monje, Martha Monje, Myra Monje, Pedro Monje-Robles, Larry Moody, Barbara Mouton, Mamta Patel, Qi Kangnan, Michael Reichert, Sheng Saechao, Kao Saephan, Muang Saephan, Song Qinghua, Alyce Tarcher, Paule Tenchavez, Nghia Tran, Mauro Tumbocon, Francis Wong, and Zhang Letian.
While the handbook covers the main features of Wildflowers’ theory and framework, you can find a fuller discussion in *A Theory Toward Building Socially Sustainable Communities*, a concept paper on the Wildflowers Web site (http://www.wildflowers.org). This paper elaborates on key framework components.

Wildflowers Institute is working in indigenous, racial, and ethnic communities in the United States and China. The institute is an international not-for-profit organization operating in San Francisco, California.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE HANDBOOK**

In keeping with the goal of Wildflowers Institute to promote personal and social transformation in building sustainable communities, the Wildflowers *Leadership Handbook* is designed to assist in identifying community core values, in developing community leaders, and in making explicit a culture of community that fosters spiritual replenishment, deepens social trust, and enables wealth creation. Implementation of the Wildflowers approach—building from the inside out and from the bottom up—leads the community to build on its social assets and take charge of the inevitable social and economic changes that impact it.

A special focus of the handbook is on mapping social assets for building socially sustainable communities where individuals with different strengths and backgrounds cooperate closely. To bring together spiritual leaders, musicians, innovators, small-business owners, elders, youth, service providers, formal and informal leaders, and individuals with disabilities, they must all be identified and engaged in helping to build a community. They must also embrace a lens and a theory of social change that are strength based, self-generative, and transformational.
BACKGROUND

For over a quarter of a century, Wildflowers Institute has focused on leadership and the culture of community in the United States and abroad. Our experiences have led us to see the economy as a major influence in the lives of people in communities and as driving the velocity of change in our society today. At no time in history has the community been so challenged by the global economy in its identity, cohesiveness, and transformative capacities.

One of the most effective ways of helping one generation communicate with the next in a global economy is to make explicit a culture of community that prepares and helps everyone in the community to survive, grow, and be their best. The community culture must also build social trust, promote healthy behavior, and protect and nourish the most vulnerable groups: elders, children, the disabled, and marginalized individuals in the community.

Culture is vital to community sustainability. It is culture that provides a compass and direction for children, youth, and adults to grow and develop in healthy and socially responsible ways. It is culture that brings people together and cultivates the capacities of individuals, families, and whole communities to see, learn, and adapt to their environment. It is culture that defines what is important and develops signs and symbols to express community values and expectations. Culture is the energy of the community. When that energy is cultivated, people come together in powerful and meaningful ways.

Today, the culture of community is often invisible, except for traditional celebrations and formal events. For centuries, the culture of community was formed around building family cooperatives and community interests; however, with the introduction of the market economy, personal interests and competition have become the driving forces of many social changes. Two of the most significant challenges in today’s constantly changing environment are to make visible invisible patterns and self-organized activities to bring people together and to re-form the culture of the community in order to help everyone adapt and grow.

Many communities are now composed of diverse groups of people who moved there for work and lifestyle preferences. The kinships and social bonds that nourished and supported individuals in their community in the past are no longer strong enough today to build group solidarity. Consequently, the community’s cohesiveness has been weakened by its diversity and by the lack of public participation and community engagement.

The economic marketplace overshadows family and social relationships. Young people no longer work alongside their parents and other adults in the community. The global economy, and the market forces that support it, have caused a fundamental value shift away from the community to the individual. In other words, the marketplace and the market economy value the individual more than the family and the community.
The impact of a worldwide, highly competitive marketplace on community culture and on community members is truly remarkable. The global marketplace creates new job opportunities and wealth for individuals and for those who work in profit-making organizations. It has generated products that have improved the quality of life throughout the world.

Nonetheless, racism, sexism, and economic disparities remain and continue to undermine the community’s moral and intellectual leadership. Significant social health and social alienation problems also are evident. Alienation and isolation become common characteristics in the lives of immigrants, refugees, and marginalized populations. All these forces have had a negative impact on community sustainability.

Wildflowers believes that social alienation and isolation are caused by our own inability to maintain a meaningful culture that balances social and spiritual replenishment and individual wealth creation. A major contemporary challenge for every person is to determine how individuals come together in self-organized activities and form sustainable communities.

In order for communities to be the drivers of social change, a community culture that brings together individuals from the different sectors in leadership formations to give positive direction and support to all community members is necessary. We must understand that every community has a different leadership formation operating on different social values. For example, informal leaders such as elders, spiritual leaders, healers, and social organizers work on behalf of groups and the whole community and are organized around a traditional culture that is generally characterized as having a vertical hierarchy and strong control and authority at the top.

In contrast, there are business and nonprofit leaders in the same community who offer a wide range of community services. They create formations, such as a coalition or association, and are organized more horizontally. The culture of this group is more market oriented and has such characteristics as interdependence, organizational competitiveness, and institutional power.

Innovators, creators, entrepreneurs, and wealth builders are yet another group or sector in the community with different cultural values. The culture of this group is very much individualistic, personally competitive, and sometimes “out of the box.”

For communities of diverse groups to be socially sustainable there must be a shared culture that brings together all the individuals and groups. This shared culture recognizes and respects the individual, family, and community and appreciates the power of competition and cooperation in different situations.

Bringing together the leadership from the different sectors or groups in the community is a major challenge facing all communities. But many of the problems facing the community, such as dislocation and decline in social health to mention only two, can be addressed
only by a broader leadership group. Wildflowers helps strengthen the capacity of its leaders to work collectively together. We work to help form a culture among these leaders and their communities that provides the moral, ethical, and social guidance to complex social situations.

**WILDFLOWERS FRAMEWORK**

To build community sustainability, the leadership groups must employ a new conceptual framework that is for everyone in the community—social activists, service providers, business leaders, informal and formal leaders, youth, and so on. A new vocabulary is required and new lenses are needed for discovering, naming, and claiming/reclaiming the culture of community. What follows is a description of the culture of community as being both a core culture and an interface culture and how these cultures differ in their patterns of behavior and in self-organized activities. Both cultures are essential for families and communities in the twenty-first century. The distinctions between core and interface cultures are shown in Chart 1.

![Chart 1: The Culture of Community](image_url)
Community Core Culture

The core culture is a system of beliefs, values, premises, and behavior patterns that builds identity and social trust and replenishes community members. The core forms the community’s moral and ethical behavior and is deeply rooted in time and history. Its leadership formation respects experiences and wisdom. Its virtues define the individual in the context of community identity.

The core culture of a community serves as a centripetal force to bring individuals from similar but not identical cultures toward the center for replenishment and social renewal. Sacred spaces are naturally formed as centers of social gravity for community members. Open green spaces invite elders and grandchildren to come together in meaningful ways.

The community core culture is different from traditional cultures. Although the core culture draws heavily from traditional culture for its beliefs, premises, and behaviors that bring people together today, it holds up values, practices, and symbols that help communities grow in social capital and in personal passion. Core culture values and practices are compatible with and remain relevant to contemporary times.

Community Interface Culture

Every community has an interface culture that is embraced by numerous individuals and organizations. The interface culture is a system of beliefs, values, premises, and behavior patterns that encourages individuals and institutions to go beyond their own boundaries to build understanding and relationships with other communities, groups, and institutions. The interface culture is open and flexible and grapples with choices. It builds productive interethnic and interracial relationships. It connects the community to other communities and to the ever-present marketplace. In the interface, social spaces such as restaurants, concerts, museums, and workplaces become centers of social gravity for individuals to come together, engage, and gain personal insight and understanding. Whereas the core culture is a centripetal force, drawing people inward, the interface culture is a centrifugal force, moving individuals outward and engaging them beyond their own communities. Figures 1, 2, and 3 reflect the interactions between the core and interface cultures.

When the interface culture is defined and developed primarily by the marketplace and not by the community, it is characteristically expressed by values such as time, money, and the prestige of material objects. There is almost always a significant gap between those who see the world through their traditional cultures and those who see it from the perspective of the market culture. This gap results in social dysfunctions and social health problems in the community. (Figure 3B illustrates a diminished core culture and an underdeveloped interface culture.) In such cases, communities are motivated more by market values than by people and their social assets. All communities must nurture a culture that helps children, youth, adults, and elders learn about one another and build meaningful and productive relationships. The building of these relationships is informed by the community defining its own
interface culture—one that encourages the discovery and appreciation of differences, that learns from other cultures and introduces new knowledge and technologies to the community, and that is equitable, fair, and just.

When community leaders strengthen social spaces for children, youth, and elders to grow and develop, and when these leaders help these individuals see and think in fundamentally different paradigms—through lenses of core and interface cultures, then everyone has the opportunity to learn from one another and grow to their fullest potential. For communities to be socially and economically sustainable, it is essential for those who hold the core culture and those who embrace the interface culture to work side by side for the benefit of all.
The beauty of the Wildflowers theory is that it focuses on social assets as the building blocks for the community. In conventional approaches to social and economic development, attention is placed on the identification of social needs and shoring up institutional and programmatic weaknesses. This needs-based approach is rooted in a market-driven logic in which businesses identify human needs and develop new products to fulfill those needs. Naturally, this kind of market approach leads to dependency and is absolutely contrary to the Wildflowers approach.

Wildflowers postulates that developing a strong core culture and an effective interface culture leads to building a sustainable community.

We seek to cultivate a self-generative culture that is inherent in the community. We know that communities prosper, grow, and are sustainable in a global economy when the culture of the community fosters innovation and creativity, deepens social and spiritual replenishment, and protects the most vulnerable members of the community.

Culture brings people together in powerful and productive ways. It is the culture that guides the most vulnerable to protect and nurture one another and that helps children, youth, and adults successfully navigate pathways to success. Wildflowers encourages nonprofit leaders and formal and informal community leaders to cultivate a culture of community that fosters social trust, safety, health, and a preparedness to engage positively in a global economy.

There must be social spaces in families and in the community for replenishment, for public participation in community services, for personal growth, and for innovation and creativity. These social spaces are essential building blocks for developing a socially sustainable culture—a culture that brings together different individuals from different environments. The absence of these spaces will lead to fragmentation of the family and community, resulting in a declining and diminishing community unable to survive in a global economy.

To understand community development, we review three different economic eras and discuss the culture of community most relevant and effective in each era. It is important to see the community culture in relationship to the economy because it helps the community see clearly the virtues, values, and social spaces that are most necessary for sustainability.
Agrarian Economy

Three to four hundred years ago, most of the world was organized around an agrarian economy. The wealth of families depended upon the number of extended family members, their capacity to cooperate with one another, and the amount of land or businesses that they owned.

During this agrarian period, individuals and families survived by developing social trust, cohesiveness, and collective identity—they learned from generation to generation how best to work together and provide for their families. For centuries, farmers and merchants and their families lived in similar ways, holding up the traditional values and culture. Chart 2 illustrates the community culture before the Industrial Revolution.

During the industrial and postindustrial eras, the economy grew significantly by the manufacture of materials and products sold on a competitive basis in the marketplace. To succeed in this market economy, individuals identified needs and pursued their own profit-making ventures to address those needs. People moved and traveled to different parts of the world.
for work. Many migrated from one state or province to another in response to employment opportunities.

**Market Economy**

As the market economy grew stronger and as farming generated less revenue, people were forced to shift away from the traditional culture of family and community cooperation to competition and individualism. What the industrial society valued was the ability of individuals to develop their self-interests into business enterprises and to compete successfully in the marketplace. This shift from an agrarian economy to a market economy led to a cultural transformation in the community and in societies all over the world. Chart 3 illustrates this transformation.

While many people went into some form of business, others provided community services such as health care, education, youth services, and elderly care. These professionals and service providers responded to the market needs of the community. This situation works well in communities that are economically developed, but not very well in communities with

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**Chart 3: Community Culture before and after the Industrial Revolution**
significant poverty. In poor communities, there are few service providers and professionals willing to dedicate their time and energy without sufficient financial remuneration. And while the government provides safety nets for the most vulnerable populations, the influence of the market economy on government policies will lead to decreases in direct support.

**Global Economy**

We are now in a global economy era. Globalization forces us to rethink our sense of the individual and the community. The global economy is stimulating efficiency, productivity, and innovation, and it is changing the demographic landscape of communities worldwide. There is greater relocation of workers and families who have lost their jobs to outsourcing and offshore entities. This relocation may be more permanent than what we have seen in the past because the economy is driven by information and service industries that require more skilled and professional labor. As a result, people are leaving and newcomers from different racial and ethnic groups are taking up residence, which is changing the composition and culture of community.

In the twenty-first century, poverty will increase substantially, especially in those marginalized communities where people are not yet fully educated and prepared to innovate and engage in wealth creation. Professor Yunxiang Yan, University of California at Los Angeles, noted that “it was predicted in a 1995 high-level meeting of world leaders that only 20% of the current labor force will be enough to operate the new economy while the remaining 80% are bound to be surplus laborers—known as the 20:80 society in the 21st century.”

If this prediction is correct, the middle class will shrink substantially and there will be a much larger population of people in poverty.

Given the real challenges facing communities and the very likelihood of increased poverty, how are the most vulnerable groups going to manage in the new global economy? Since 2000, Wildflowers has learned that communities have employed their own social assets and developed their own mechanisms for protecting the most vulnerable and for preparing the next generation to enter the global workforce.

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1. Yunxiang Yan, presentation to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation Board of Trustees, Battle Creek, Michigan, April 15, 2004.
Social Players within the Community

All communities have inherent strengths that are employed every day in addressing social challenges. Many of these strengths are invisible but nonetheless powerful. Wildflowers has identified four different groups within the community, each with its own distinctly different human capital.

First, there are the spiritual leaders, informal leaders, healers, elders, grandchildren, and community artists. These individuals form the social trust, safety, cohesion, and replenishment for the whole community. They flourish in an environment that values cooperation and the interests of the community.

Second, there are individuals who are the informal teachers and mentors, relatives, family members and extended family members, and friends who help loved ones grow to be their best. These individuals give positively and constructively to others without expecting reciprocity. Their generosity is enormous. These individuals enjoy an environment of cooperation, helping others to be successful and achieve their goals.

Third, there are individuals who are the innovators, corporate leaders, entrepreneurs, intellectuals, athletes, and individualistic artists; they are the wealth creators of the community. These individuals provide the community with opportunities to grow and change. They are at their best when they have the freedom to pursue their own interests in competitive environments.

Fourth, there are the professional service providers, community philanthropists, and advocates who make up the community service sector of the community. These people work best when they compete with others in serving the community.

All four groups of social assets, but especially the group that provides social trust and cohesion (lower left quadrant), are essential for a sustainable community in a global economy. The new configuration affecting communities is reflected in Chart 4.

The Wildflowers framework views the community on a continuum from those people and institutions that operate on market principles of competition to those that represent family principles of cooperation. The framework also views the motivation of people involved in the community on a continuum from personal interests to community interests. Seeing the community from this perspective helps us to see the social spaces that cultivate particular sets of cultural values.
For communities to be more socially sustainable, there must be social spaces within families and the community that help people to come together in powerful ways.

First, spaces for social and spiritual replenishment that nourish and protect people form the core culture of the community. The core brings people together to provide a sense of belonging, contribute to a collective identity, and assist in the development of social formations within the community. The core forms self-organized activities that attract individuals with similar interests and values and give their lives nourishment and meaning.

Chart 4: Community Culture and Social Players in the Global Marketplace

Social Spaces in the Community
Some self-organized activities nurture the elders and the grandchildren; others focus on the safety of all members in the community. When these activities are shared among many, they become centers of social gravity. These centers are gathering places for people who uphold common values and expectations about respecting people and relationships. Chart 5 indicates the need and place for social and spiritual replenishment spaces to foster cohesive community values and actions.

For example, replenishment spaces enable women in a community to share stories and support one another as they cook, grandparents and grandchildren to engage in heart-to-heart communication, and youth to create music together.
Second, personal growth spaces are important to community life and also contribute to the core culture. These are places where young and old, individuals and groups, can join others as they pursue personally fulfilling lives. Communities that are able to offer such spaces cultivate mentorship between young and old, experienced and inexperienced community members. In such spaces, people reflect on their personal passions and they sharpen their direction in life. Chart 6 reflects where personal growth spaces are to be found in the Wildflowers framework.
Third, community service spaces form part of the interface culture. These spaces are where important human services such as education, health care, youth development, and senior services are provided. The most effective way to provide these services is to be rooted in the core culture of community so that the core values of the community are expressed in schools, health centers, social services, and other social institutions.

The people and institutions in this quadrant are the essential players in educating and preparing the next generation to succeed in the marketplace. But for these institutions to survive and thrive, there must be community participation and volunteerism. Chart 7 illustrates the place and role of community service spaces.
Fourth, spaces that value creativity, innovation, and wealth creation, both for individuals and for the community, also form the interface and are essential to the financial sustainability of the community. Without wealth creation spaces, entrepreneurs and talented young people leave the community for other opportunities. Individuals supporting the community need assurances that successful businesses can be established to provide needed services and to enable wealth creation. Chart 8 reflects this social space in communities.

Those who grow most in this space have a strong interface culture that reflects change making and that embraces diversity. Individuals with accomplished interface skills engage in self-realization and wealth-creating activities, many related to the marketplace. These activities are often viewed as chaotic or threatening to the community’s core values.
Wildflowers values both core and interface cultures and works on creating “both/and” spaces for communication and engagement between and among the different core and interface players. We work to achieve a dynamic balance between the core and the interface in order for there to be a socially sustainable human system.

Wildflowers offers processes and tools to help community members map social assets and their spaces. The objective is to build social spaces that form the foundation for a sustainable community. We help communities strengthen their core culture and develop their interface. In this way, community members are rooted in their cultural identity and are open to and active in learning and growing.

**WILDFLOWERS APPROACH TO COMMUNITY FORMATION: INSIDE-OUT AND BOTTOM-UP**

First, we provide a workshop to community members that presents the Wildflowers theory and framework for building socially sustainable communities. The workshop builds a shared vocabulary and offers our lens for viewing the culture of community, including its people, spaces, and self-organized activities that lead it toward sustainability. We explore and identify community strengths and build on them as our approach to community formation and transformation.

Second, we help community members name and claim the culture of community and their collective identity. Wildflowers’ patented process and three-dimensional materials are used to create symbols representing a cultural mapping of the community—itself leadership formations, its self-organized activities and social spaces, and its ceremonies. Through this process, community members make visible the assets and strengths of the community.

We hold “Wildflowers Spaces”—relational and learning spaces—where the community discovers its own strengths and capacities and those of others and applies these assets to solving the social issues in the community. This space illuminates the beliefs, values, virtues, and practices that embellish the traditional culture and the market culture in order to name and claim the contemporary core culture and clearly identify the interface culture. In this way, the community identifies its social assets: the human, intellectual, and social capital; self-organized activities; and oftentimes invisible formations in the community. And the Wildflowers Spaces help the community reframe and refine a community lens that is more socially sustainable.

Third, Wildflowers’ workshops help the community create visions and strategies for becoming more sustainable. These workshops bring different individuals together to form commonly agreed-upon designs for developing businesses and for cultivating social spaces that incubate innovation, foster creativity, and deepen social and spiritual rejuvenation.
Among the greatest strengths of the community are the wise elders and community artists found in the informal sector and the younger entrepreneurs in the private sector. Significant synergy results if the community culture values the wisdom and morality of the elders, the creativity of the artists, and the innovation of the wealth creators.

Fourth, we help community leaders make explicit their leadership formations in response to different social challenges facing them. Clarifying the roles and expectations of individuals holding leadership positions and making explicit the premises for working together enhance their capacity to work effectively in the community.

Wildflowers brings the community leaders together to visit other communities to learn about different leadership formations and approaches to building socially sustainable systems, local enterprises, and cross-cultural relationships. We also provide workshops for community leaders to think about the future and develop their visions and strategies for cultivating social spaces in families and in the community.

Fifth, Wildflowers encourages community leaders to acquire international experiences in other countries to observe how communities are being impacted by and responsive to the global economy. These experiences are essential to providing guidance and direction to one’s own community.

Collaboration is the key to building and maintaining community sustainability. We are living in a time when the individual, the family, the community, and the marketplace must be simultaneously engaged in order to create socially and financially sustainable communities.

**Strengthening the Culture of Community**

Our approach helps communities to identify their core and interface cultures. We work with community groups to map the community culture, analyze present and past situations, clarify leadership formations, reflect on the history of the community, and develop personal and shared visions of the community.

We help community members make explicit their traditional culture, highlighting its strengths. Many of the informal community leaders have local knowledge of how to get things done and they know what people expect from their leaders. The informal leadership is a pattern of self-organization formed by what the community members expect from their leaders and from each other. To every extent possible, we try to help preserve and strengthen these self-organized activities.

People with a strong core culture have a very clear understanding of boundaries; they know what is inside and what is outside their culture. They hold a collective identity and a social and cultural consciousness. They prefer to relate to people who share similar cultural practices. These men and women generally stay within their communities and prefer to be
invisible to individuals from other communities. They are dependable, reliable, and loyal to
their families and to each other.

Defining the interface is equally important. Interface players cross boundaries easily and
are open to new ideas and ways of thinking. Interface individuals interact with people from
other communities and are actively involved in promoting and advancing innovation,
growth, and development. These players operate in organizations and areas of the commu-
nity that value both core and interface cultures. They may embrace a traditional culture, but
they also understand how to use the culture of the marketplace to interact with others.

In community building, Wildflowers processes help community leaders to see and to bring
together different assets in the core and interface cultures. Our processes and tools make
explicit the values, premises, and practices in the core and the interface. We help community
leaders develop a shared culture and design new social spaces that further enable them to
come together.

**Wildflowers Optics Toolbox**

The aim of the Wildflowers methodology for community formation and transformation is
to help community members learn and grow through powerful learning experiences. To do
this, the community creates lenses for outsiders to look through to better understand the
community culture—what is important on the inside of the community.

Through discussions about what people see inside the community, the lenses become mir-
rors for community members to see their own strengths—their human, intellectual, and
social capital. This two-way process of engaging mirrors and lenses is generative and trans-
formational for the individual and for the whole community.

There are three learning tools that we use in community building. What follows is a descrip-
tion of Model-building, Wildflowers Spaces, and community sites.

**Model-building**

First, Wildflowers offers a self-discovery learning process and tools to assist communities in
naming and claiming their culture—the self-organized activities, social spaces, leadership
and social formations, and values. We invite informal leaders, artists, musicians, nonprofit
organization executives, and business entrepreneurs from within a community to Model-
building sessions.

The Wildflowers tools consist of figurines, building blocks, and multiple representations
and variations of individual and community life. Community members, by themselves and
in small groups, select items from the “toolbox” and create individual or collective models
representing the life and structure of their communities. Once the models are completed,
we engage the community by asking a series of questions relating the Wildflowers process
model to the community.
Examples of questions that we ask community members once they have completed building their models include:

1. What are the elements used in building the model?
2. What do the elements in the model symbolize?
3. What is left in/left out of the model? Is this an intentional decision?
4. What do the use of space and the thematic use of colors/shapes/figures signify?
5. What are the relationships between spaces/structures/subjects in the model?
6. How did the group organize to produce the model?
7. What was built first (usually the object of greatest importance)?
8. Where is the builder located within the model? Why?
9. Where are the centers of gravity? What is their relationship to the builder?
10. What would the builder or builders of the model change? Where and how would these changes take place?
11. Where does change originate within the model?

These example questions are revised and expanded as we hold different Model-building sessions over time. Our questions encourage members of the community to talk about their models, to explain them, and, as a result, to engage the process as a new learning experience.

Models created by individuals’ and groups’ self-discovery processes become a visual vocabulary composed of symbols that represent community values and objectives. Creating a model often incorporates implicit assumptions and patterns visible and accessible—not only to the model builder(s), but to those who view the model. The model acts as a lens for others to see themselves more clearly and as a mirror to reflect upon their own group dynamics more clearly.

The immediacy and the impact of the Wildflowers process, in combination with its accompanying verbal narratives and reflections, create a multidimensional visual vocabulary that cuts through existing barriers of language and culture to create new communication pathways and increased understandings among community members.

Model-building also reveals the community’s social spaces. The process uncovers and amplifies deeply held implicit premises about group vision, leadership formation, values, and community practices. The process bypasses usual modes of oral expression, such as a conversation, and uncovers implicit premises or postulates that motivate behavior. Wildflowers helps create spaces in the community that address both physical and spiritual environments.

In summary, Wildflowers training sessions lead to self-discovery processes emerging from these experiences. The process involves:
• Seeing one’s own community through the Wildflowers framework
• Discovering the self-generative centers of social gravity, self-organized activities, and unconscious premises of the community and applying them to processes of personal, family, and community formations
• Reflecting on the culture of community and reframing one’s own identity, attitudes, behaviors, and values
• Experimenting with new roles and relationships and with art and music that build social trust and are replenishing, innovative, and creative
• Designing and incubating new centers of social gravity that cultivate intellectual and social capital and creativity and increase property value in the community

This process of self-discovery facilitates the uncovering of the community’s premises.

Creating a Wildflowers Space
Second, we create Wildflowers Spaces in communities through direct face-to-face communication and by role modeling. Storytelling, festivals, costumes, photographs, and other created images address the power and beauty of natural social formations found in community values. What is special about Wildflowers Spaces is that they illuminate differences in cultural practices in a safe and nonjudgmental environment.

We use the Wildflowers Space to assure that community members are able to make ideas from different cultures concrete, involve everyone in the conversation, and ensure that they are considering the same topic. The space is a tool for finding a common pathway forward into the future. Its successful use produces clarity of ideas and consensus leading to solutions that can be supported by diverse community constituencies.

We open with a ceremony, inviting members of the community to describe their spiritual, cultural, and social powers that guide them in their daily lives. We solicit community members’ viewpoints and encourage their participation. The dialogue engages them in a verbal process to create a Wildflowers Space for authentic social communication.

Creating a Wildflowers Space in the Iu Mien community, for example, first involves arranging elders, youth, and family members in a circle. We honor King Pan, their great ancestor, and welcome them. We then acknowledge them for their attendance, leadership roles, and contributions to the community.

Once we complete the opening remarks, we invite members of the community to share their points of view on a matter of concern to the whole group. As long as an individual is speaking on that topic, others listen without interrupting. Everyone is given the opportunity to contribute to the discussion or to “put their hearts on the table.”

Through this process, views are aired, conflicts resolved, and decisions made. The process is successful when issues are viewed from multiple angles, differences are examined, questions
asked, and connections drawn with other circumstances and solutions. The Wildflowers Space enables community members to get to the “heart of the matter” and keep attention focused there. We close with a ceremony to bring everyone together.

Community Sites

Our third learning tool involves immersion experiences to gain an understanding of the social functions and leadership formations in diverse indigenous, ethnic, and racial communities. Such experiences focus on different approaches that these communities employ to be more sustainable.

We meet with informal and spiritual leaders to learn from them about how they are drawing on their own social assets to address social health, social cohesion and renewal, and social alienation issues. We learn together about the mapping of informal leaders and other social players in the community that improve the health and safety of the community. We learn from them about the values and virtues that they are cultivating. We see through their lens the power of their self-organized activities to nurture and support children, youth, and families. And we gain a greater appreciation for the application of local knowledge as it relates to the health and social well-being of the community.

The sites help us develop clarity of direction and an appreciation of different leadership formations and their functions. We recognize that it takes different individuals with different assets to build sustainable communities. There are spiritual leaders, elders, and others who work together to develop replenishment spaces. And there are wealth creators, innovators, and individual artists who are building a financial foundation for themselves and for the community. How each of these groups is formed and is cultivating its emerging leaders and how the different groups build a collective leadership are critical to a community being sustainable. Moreover, the sites highlight the approaches they are taking to develop their own self-regulatory mechanisms, which in turn help individuals see the consequences of their actions in the context of their family and the whole community.

Each of the Wildflowers community sites has its own way of being sustainable. For example, in an American Indian urban community, the emphasis is on traditional spiritual practices and indigenous cosmology while in a community composed of Latinos, Blacks, and Asians, the focus is on honoring each group and building shared spaces that bring different groups together.

Learning How to Build a Socially Sustainable Community

Wildflowers helps communities to learn our approach, which includes developing knowledge and skills applicable to and appropriate for building sustainability. Through a variety of experiences involving the community sites, the institute has identified a set of community-building skills. Community members are able to:
• Engage the mapping process to identify social assets such as people, self-organized activities, culture, and local knowledge about history, place, and practice
• Define a socially sustainable community
• List the cultural values evident in the community, indicating which is core and which is interface
• Conduct community analyses of core and interface cultures
• Create Wildflowers Spaces for authentic and meaningful communication and interactions
• Design Wildflowers ceremonies
• Build an environment where mistakes are accepted and learned from
• Promote communication, acquire listening skills, and build a common language among diverse members of the community
• Discover patterns to determine what is important to the community and how community values are expressed
• Facilitate storytelling as a process for self-expression and influencing others
• Increase an individual’s participation in community action
• Explore and support marketplace interface activities within the community
• Create symbols and logo making
• Be a self-reflective learner/leader in a learning community

This set of skills reflects the current work of Wildflowers in its effort to develop socially sustainable communities. More skills will be added, and current ones modified, as we gain additional understanding and experience in our work. Our efforts increase communication between and within the core and interface cultures found in every community.

The Importance of Reflection in Wildflowers Meetings
Reflection is a method of thinking about and analyzing experiences in ways that develop comprehensive understandings and clearer assessments of one’s performance and capabilities. Reflection sets the tone and enables the participant to understand what is important to learn in every situation. It gives permission for individuals to learn from one another in public activities. It motivates people to participate and share their worries and learn from their failures.

Evaluation and Self-Assessment Techniques
The Wildflowers approach to socially sustainable communities is based upon self-assessment techniques that include reflective learning and a process of analysis of individuals and communities. The process of mapping a community’s core and interface cultures requires keeping records of community involvement and actions. Self- and group assessments of these maps and records lead to determining needed next steps in community development.

Planning and conducting community-building events to promote centers of social gravity require ongoing learning in the community. Just as self- and group assessments are neces-
sary to continue community development, Wildflowers continually assesses the value and usefulness of its approach to community building.

We evaluate information from the Model-building process and Wildflowers Spaces and assess the usefulness of the mirror and lens metaphors. These critiques deepen everyone’s understanding of the current situation and of a process to promote socially sustainable communities.

Wildflowers staff video-document the formations and transformations in communities and the reflective process of learning throughout the program. Wildflowers uses this material to discover implicit patterns and principles for building sustainable communities. Community members also use the material to reflect on individual processes and approaches to community building and to develop stories of lessons learned.

**CONCLUSION**

The handbook is undergoing continual development and refinement to ensure its usefulness. Wildflowers appreciates ongoing assessments of the handbook as a useful resource in our work with communities. The interplay between the focus on the Wildflowers approach and its implications reflected in the handbook illustrates the magnitude of building socially sustainable communities. We are working on ways for communities to remain in communication with one another and with Wildflowers through intercommunity communications and through the Wildflowers Web site.
Glossary of Terms

Communities: ground-level generators and preservers of the shared values and common frames of reference essential to the health of a free society and the accomplishments of group purposes. (John Gardner, 1994)

Core culture: a system of beliefs, values, premises, and behavior patterns that builds identity and social trust and replenishes community members.

Interface culture: a system of beliefs, values, premises, and behavior patterns that reflects innovation, change, and diversity. Appreciation of differences is encouraged and new knowledge and technologies are introduced into the community.

Model-building: a unique process in which individuals work alone and collectively, selecting from hundreds of miniature figurines and other objects, to build simple three-dimensional models to reflect the most salient aspects of their ideas.

Premises: human behavior is always motivated by certain purposes, and these purposes grow out of sets of assumptions which are not usually recognized by those who hold them. The basic premises of a particular culture are unconsciously accepted by the individual through his constant and exclusive participation in that culture. It is these assumptions—the essence of all the culturally conditioned purposes, motives, and principles—which determine the behavior of a people, underlie all the institutions of a community, and give them unity. (Hsiao-Tung Fei, 1945)

Replenishment spaces: social and physical spaces that promote social safety, social trust, identity, communication, and social cohesion.

Self-organized activities: in complex adapter systems self-organization emerges from the interaction of the activities or subsystems with each other. The principles involved in the interaction are not controlled by a hierarchically imposed structure, and self-organization emerges as a source of stability in complex systems, such as a community.

Social players include, but are not limited to, informal and formal leaders, social activists, service providers, business leaders, youth, spiritual leaders, elders, grandchildren, artists, teachers and mentors, entrepreneurs, athletes, and community philanthropists.

Social spaces are composed of individuals clustered together who share similar values, beliefs, premises and behaviors that foster replenishment, community participation, personal growth, and wealth creation.

Socially sustainable community: a community with a culture that guides people coming together to care for and replenish one another and that develops the individual, fosters cross-pollination of ideas, and embraces diversity.
**Wealth creation spaces:** places in the community that address the marketplace.

**Wildflowers Spaces:** gathering places of people who uphold common values and expectations about respecting people and relationships. They illuminate the beliefs, values, virtues, and community practices; they engage in authentic social communication to create the environment to pursue shared actions and shared cultural premises in the construction and maintenance of community.