Community Heart & Soul™

*Guided by What Matters Most*

RESOURCE

For Heart & Soul Process Phase

1 2 3 4

# How to Develop Heart & Soul Statements

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## *WHAT WE BELIEVE*

*The Orton Family Foundation's mission is to empower people to shape the future of their communities by improving local decision-making, creating a shared sense of belonging, and ultimately strengthening the social, cultural, and economic vibrancy of each place.*

We do this by assisting the residents of small cities and towns in the use of the Heart & Soul method, a barn-raising approach to community planning and development designed to increase participation in local decision making and empower residents to shape the future of their communities in a way that upholds the unique character of each place.

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## *ACKNOWLEDGMENTS*


The Orton Family Foundation is a small family operating foundation that invests in practices that enhance the ability of citizens to participate in local decision-making. Our initiative, Community Heart & Soul™. Guided by What Matters Most, is a new approach to community planning and development.

The Foundation wishes to thank the many individuals, local elected and appointed officials, community volunteers, and like-minded practitioners, non-profits, foundations and business and trade organizations that have contributed in countless ways to our development of the Community Heart & Soul approach.

A special thank you to the residents, volunteers, and leaders in our partner Community Heart & Soul towns who learn with us, on the ground, to evolve the Heart & Soul method presented in this Guide. We could not possibly have done it without all of you, a community of inventive, determined people.

Finally, our deep gratitude to Lyman Orton—founder, board chair and funder of the Orton Family Foundation—for his generosity, passion and guidance. Community Heart & Soul would be a dream, not a growing reality, without his persistent belief in the regular folks who live and work in America's small towns.


Learn more about Heart & Soul at **orton.org/heart-soul**


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# Introduction

## "When a community takes the time to get to know itself, it gains a sense of identity and purpose that informs decisions about its future,"

*» Lyman Orton, founder, Orton Family Foundation*

At their core, Heart & Soul Statements reflect the one thing all residents share in common – living in this town.

Much of the work in Community Heart & Soul is devoted to exploring what residents care most about in their community—the customs, characteristics, traditions and emotional connections that contribute to each town's unique character. We call the sum of these attributes a community's heart and soul.

Heart & Soul Statements are the distillation into clear, concise language of what matters most to residents. These statements help towns prioritize actions and guide future decisions, ensuring that the community's heart and soul is strengthened and that the community grows more resilient. Developing and then using Heart & Soul Statements is a fundamental focus of Community Heart & Soul.

### Heart & Soul Statements ARE the things we share that connect us:

- Emotional expressions by residents of those things they love about their town;
- Feelings of connectedness to other residents, groups, and local government that occur because of the culture, character, informal systems, organization, and attitude of what many refer to as *small town character*;
- Expressions of what makes their town special and what differentiates it from all other towns.

### Heart & Soul Statements ARE NOT the things that divide and separate us:

- Political beliefs;
- Religious beliefs;
- Lingering resentments, old feuds, squabbles, or what your neighbor's dog did on your lawn five years ago.

So put aside negative thoughts and build from that one thing you all have in common – you live here!

Here is a phase-by-phase look at how the statements are developed during the Community Heart & Soul process:

### Phase 2: Explore Your Community

- **Identification:** The purpose of exploring the community through storytelling and other engagement activities is to identify what matters most to community members, which supplies the information, or data, to build Heart & Soul Statements.

### Phase 3: Make Decisions

- **Develop Options:** Heart & Soul Statements are used to transform ideas into options. Phase 3 also includes examining what matters most in context: How have important traditions and characteristics been strengthened or eroded over time? Are things getting better or worse? How could they be improved in the future? Local and national trends are factored in.
- **Make Choices:** The statements also guide in developing and prioritizing options. Making choices between competing Heart & Soul desires requires dialogue, which you'll be poised to do better after the conversations that occurred in Phase 2.
- **Formalize Decisions:** An action plan to move the engagement and dialogue to tangible results that residents can see brings life to the work and process, and shows how those things people truly value about where they live can become real.

### Phase 4: Take Action

- **Community decisions:** Finally, Heart & Soul Statements become integrated into decision making beyond the scope of the Community Heart & Soul project. For example, strongly consider integrating the statements into municipal or land use plans. In towns where we've worked, city councils have posted the statements on the walls of their chambers to remind them of what matters most to the community as they make decisions about budgets and policies.

This resource:

1. Defines an effective Heart & Soul Statement.
2. Explains the nuts and bolts of drafting one.


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## Building Heart & Soul Statements

We have learned that these statements must be an early focus of the Community Heart & Soul process. During Phase 2, Explore Your Community, information is collected from various community engagement activities that employ storytelling (see our Using Storytelling in Community Heart & Soul resource). That information, gathered from and heard by a broad representation of the community, is rich with Heart & Soul specific information. Heart & Soul asks direct questions about what's working in the community, about the heartfelt connections to your town instead of divisive old issues and "what's wrong" or why "we can't". What people focus on and what emerges is a positive and shared community narrative that is built on the tangible and emotional connections people have to where they live.

As stories are told, retold and collected, community themes begin to emerge. These are the high level feelings that create positive emotional connections to community that most of us can readily identify with. At this point, they won't be specific enough to reveal what is unique about your town. With additional discussion, questions asked, focus and work, however, residents tease out and share the unique community attributes and the personal benefits they attach to those attributes. All of this rests on what we universally value about place.

The result of this inquiry and data analysis is a set of statements that are at the center of a Heart & Soul plan. What does a Heart & Soul Statement look like? How is it created?

Heart & Soul Statements are summary sentences that capture *what* matters most and *why*. In general, an effective Heart & Soul Statement will contain within it three key elements:

1. **An action word or verb** like treasure, value, respect, honor—We *treasure* the natural environment. We *value* youth. We *respect* the rich cultural heritage of the area. We "*will be/will have*" is also appropriate as some Heart & Soul Statements speak to a community's aspirations.

1. **What is important**—the Heart & Soul theme and/or the attribute. We treasure *the natural environment* and *the ability to access the mountains surrounding our community*. (**Community Theme:** natural environment. **Community Attribute:** ability to access the mountains. )

1. **Why it's important**—the benefits to residents. We treasure the natural environment and ready access to the trails and mountains surrounding our community because preserving and creating outdoor recreation opportunities for all ages and abilities *contributes to the overall health of our community*. (**Personal benefits:** overall health of community.) Personal benefits usually align with a **universal value**, in this instance personal enjoyment and stimulation. See Primary & Secondary American Values.

Crafting clear, concise Heart & Soul Statements is the most powerful way to bring mutual understanding and agreement about what matters to community members. Aim for statements that give enough detail to reflect the unique attributes and benefits of the community, but are no longer than one or two sentences. The two most common mistakes made in crafting statements are: 1) making them too general to give good guidance for decisions and/or actions and 2) getting ahead of the process by including specific goals and strategies.

Figure 1: Building Effective Heart & Soul Statements

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## Heart & Soul Statement Tree

Developing a Heart & Soul Statement "tree" is a helpful way to organize the data collected throughout story sharing. Data is not always black and white, especially when identifying what matters most. We often refer to data collected through storytelling as "data with a soul". You will need to read and reflect on the data to accurately map it. Be careful not to project your own values onto the comments. If there is not a clear link between the attributes and benefits or benefits and themes, don't make assumptions. It is better to recognize that this connection is still in question and to ask the community to clarify it during the verification process described in the Field Guide.

A Heart & Soul Statement tree (Figure 2) is a hierarchical diagram that illustrates the relationships and connections between community themes, community attributes and personal benefits. Here is an example of a Heart & Soul Statement tree for the theme **safety**.

*Heart & Soul Statement: We value being a close-knit community where we can go anywhere anytime and feel safe.*

To create a Heart & Soul Statement tree, follow these steps in order:

1. Identify the overarching community theme.
2. Identify the comments in which residents mention community attributes related to that theme.
3. Identify comments that connect those attributes to why they are important, the personal benefits they provide.
4. Analyze both the benefits and comments made by residents to reveal the universal value. You can follow the linear model shown (Figure 2), or you can be creative with your tree (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Heart & Soul Statement Tree

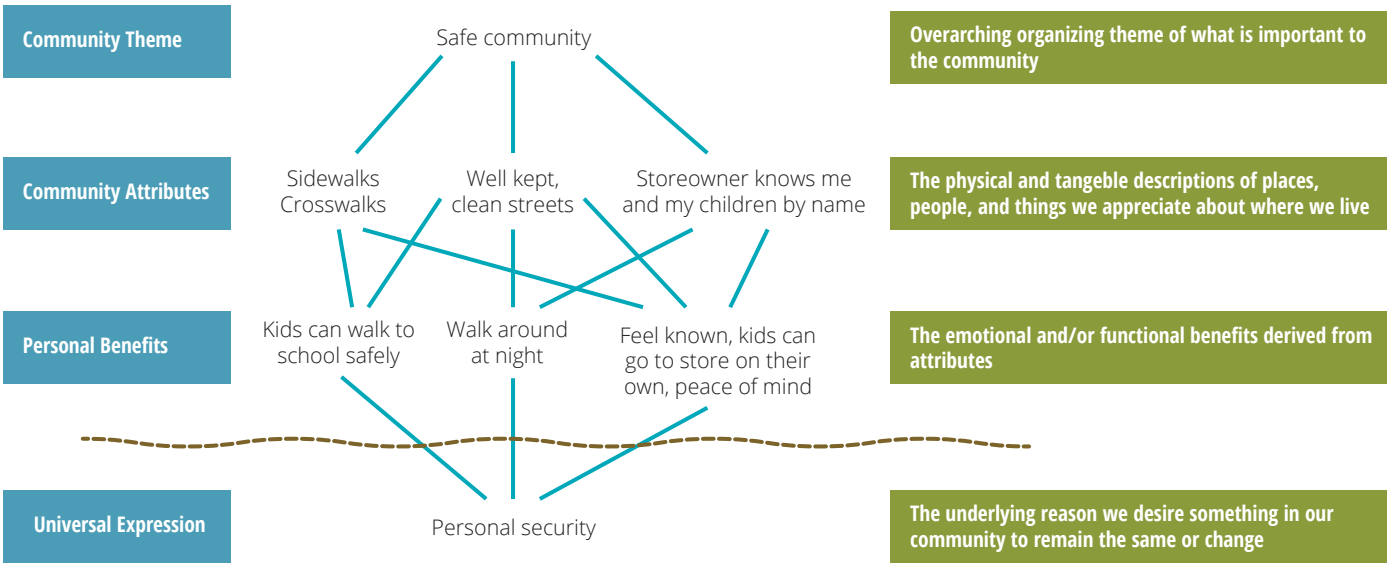


Figure 3: Creative approach to a statement tree

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## Diagraming Heart & Soul Statements

Once the data is sorted out you can begin to write Heart & Soul Statements.

Here is a strong Heart & Soul Statement diagramed to show that the key elements are included.

1. We **value** being a **close-knit community** where **anyone can go anywhere, anytime and feel safe**.

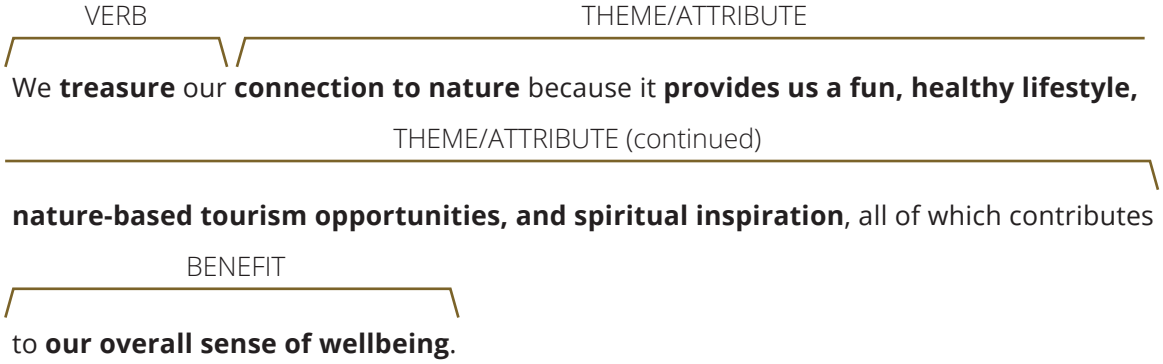
Here are examples of statements that fall short:

Incomplete: "We value being a close-knit community."

This statement is incomplete because it does not include a personal benefit like "feel safe".

Flawed: "We value a low crime rate."

It is flawed because it is the wrong focus and a low crime rate is a statistic. A town can have an official low crime rate, but residents may not feel safe.




2. We **treasure** our **connection to nature** because it **provides us a fun, healthy lifestyle, nature-based tourism opportunities, and spiritual inspiration**, all of which contributes to **our overall sense of wellbeing**.

Incomplete: "We treasure our connection to nature."

It is incomplete because no benefit is described; why do you treasure the connection?

Too specific: "We treasure our connection to nature by building up our trails and parks."

This statement jumps to what to do instead of why you care. Actions will be more effectively considered and chosen when built from effective Heart & Soul Statement*s*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VERB THEME/ATTRIBUTE

3. We **value** our **well-kept facilities, outdoor community activities and locally provided services**

BENEFIT

that **support an excellent quality of life and bind our community together**.

Incomplete: "We value our facilities"

It doesn't specify what about the facilities is valued.

Illogical: "We value our well-kept facilities, outdoor community activities and locally provided services that provide for a vibrant downtown."

What is the logical connection between the valued attribute and the benefit?

VERB THEME/ATTRIBUTE

4. We r**ecognize** that the **city's unique natural and built assets** are the

BENEFIT

**heart of the community's identity**, and believe they should be available to all residents.

VERB VERB THEME/ATTRIBUTE

5. We **will be** a community **that welcomes new businesses and entrepreneurs** while

BENEFIT

**maintaining the character of the community, including access to our historic waterfront**.

Weak: "We hope to welcome new business"

Weak because the verb is not aspirational or direct.


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**Here are examples of strong statements from Heart & Soul towns:**

- We value education for all members of our community at all ages. We recognize that young people are vital to the future of our community and that a good education is critical for their future success and that of our community.
- We honor all the traditions, heritages, and family ties that together unify us as a neighborly community that provides a sense of safety, belonging, and feeling cared for in our daily lives.
- We value a rural lifestyle and our natural beauty, which includes open space, vistas, dark night skies that contributes to our peaceful and relaxing environment.
- We value our youth, empowering them to serve and grow through engaging activities and leadership opportunities to positively impact their future while building confidence and self-worth.
- We value being a community that is walkable and bikeable, and accessible to all.
- Our city government will be responsive, approachable, good at listening, welcomes participation and involvement, is fair to all parts of the city and is accountable.
- We value being an active, healthy community that appreciates the outdoors and connects us to the natural environment.
- We value our lake as a heart soul element of our town and will actively preserve our access to it to enhance its character for future generations.
- We value the natural beauty of unique geologic features, extended stretches of the foothills, and unbroken stretches of natural environments that defines our place.
- We appreciate downtown events and activities that enhance life and connect people.
- We value community organizations/collaboration between public and private groups to allow for preservation of our historical and cultural assets, while providing continuity with the future.
- We will develop opportunities to foster stability and maintain excellent schools as is important to the positive development of our children.
- We recognize that agriculture contributes an important component to the fabric of our way of life in this community.
- We value our natural resources, including water, scenic vistas, air quality, and agricultural lands and their preservation for the use and enjoyment of our future generations.
- We recognize the importance for opportunities for community conversations and open dialogue that will foster positive change and help us move our community forward.
- We value a kid friendly environment with family activities and event both indoors and outdoors because it connects our community together.
- We honor our preservation and promotion of local arts and their place in providing and supporting community connections and values.
- We value joint efforts by business people, volunteers and city government as the collaborative community spirit that promotes business success and preserves our historic look and feel.
- As a community, we value sustainability that preserves the small town look, feel and character of our town today and for future residents.


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## Goals and Strategies

Goals describe desired conditions. They are not specific actions, but rather a strategic focus or direction. Most frequently, goals in a Heart & Soul project will be aimed at enhancing or maintaining the attributes or benefits associated with community themes. Strategies are how the goal can be accomplished.

In a Heart & Soul process the final product will be a community action plan that, at minimum, includes the following:

| *PLAN ELEMENT* | *DESCRIPTION* | *EXAMPLE* |
|---|---|---|
| **Heart & Soul Statements** | Statement that captures what is matters most to residents of a community and why. | *We value being a connected community where anyone can go anywhere, anytime and feel safe.* |
| **Goals** | Goals describe the desired conditions. They are not specific actions, but rather a strategic focus or direction. | *Residents will be comfortable walking their neighborhoods, downtown and in park areas at night.* |
| **Strategies and/or Actions that can be implemented in the short or long term.**<br><br>**Phase 3/Phase 4** | These are the viable opportunities for future actions and decisions in your community that enhance your Heart & Soul Statements. | • Youth expand and lead neighborhood watch program<br>• *Dedicate city budget dollars to increasing lighting around our parks.*<br>• Work with local businesses to provide youth a place to dine with free Internet and menu items priced where they can afford to encourage youth presence in downtown. |

### Sample Goals and Strategies

Here is an example of a goal and strategies that grow out of a Heart & Soul Statement.

**Heart & Soul Statement: We value being a community that is walkable, bikeable, and accessible to all.**

Goal: We will provide safe, convenient, and well maintained biking and walking opportunities appropriate for all ages and abilities.

Strategy 1.1: Adhere to the "Complete Streets" policy adopted by city council and identify corridors for prioritization based on community needs.

Strategy 1.2: Continue to carry out the 2008 Walkability and Bike Task Force recommendations while seeking new opportunities for improving cycling and walking in the community.

Strategy 1.3: Advance our Bike Friendly Community designation from the bronze level to a silver level by 2015.


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## Conclusion

Heart & Soul Statements drawn from broad community participation are at the core of the Community Heart & Soul process. Heart & Soul Statements spell out what matters most to residents of a community and provide the foundation for choosing actions that strengthen the community.

Taking the time to analyze data gathered in storytelling to identify community themes is the first step. Distilling those themes into clear, concise statements that spell out *what* matters most and *why* is the next step.

Using those statements to determine what a community should do in setting priorities, determining strategies and planning for the future, is the ultimate aim. The result is that individuals, organizations, and local government work together to maintain what makes a town special and to grow in a way that the community desires far beyond the scope of the Community Heart & Soul project.


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