

Community Heart & Soul®

Name of CHS Project/City, State: Monticello Heart & Soul, Monticello, Iowa

Population: 3,885

Challenge: Increase civic engagement in community decision-making and cultivate the next generation of leadership.

Focus: Find “missing voices” in the community and connect their voices to community decision-making. Connect investments in education to overall community health and vitality.

Key Tool: Non-traditional community engagement events that attracted new voices; story-gathering activities and videos that showcased different perspectives on the things that mattered most in the community.

Brief Description/Summary of Community:

Monticello is a bustling small town that is home to many small businesses and manufacturers, but also has a robust nonprofit community that serves a wide region in Jones County. Nestled midway between two larger communities, the town offers convenient access to “big city” amenities while still maintaining its small-town feel. Residents have many unique recreational and cultural opportunities, including the Great Jones County Fair, river access for canoeing and kayaking, Pictured Rocks County Park, disc golf, trails, campgrounds, pickle ball and tennis courts, and a modern outdoor aquatics center. Implement dealers, hardware stores, and grain elevators in town ensure that the town maintains its strong rural connections. Monticello is proud of the strong educational systems with recently improved school facilities, a youth sports and baseball complex, the Berndes Center, and the 4-H Youth Development Center.

Monticello “By the Numbers”:

- **32** Heart & Soul meeting and community events
- **38** Interviews conducted
- **2,371** Individual data items were collected at events and through online surveys
- **221** Ideas were collected to improve Monticello’s future
- **71%** Voters who approved the school bond referendum in 2018

Local Conditions:

Monticello is an active community but there was a desire to expand opportunities for involvement by new leaders, bring different voices to the table, and get more people actively engaged in decisions about the community’s future. A bond referendum to fund a new middle school had failed several times so the community felt the need to build unity and identify ways that everyone could work toward common goals.

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Volunteer and Community Response:

A group of 23 volunteers actively participated in the Heart & Soul Leadership Team throughout the process. Almost 250 people attended the various events and engagement activities that the team conducted with diverse audiences. After the Action Ideas were identified, a strong team stepped forward to keep the projects moving forward. Several younger residents on the Heart & Soul Leadership Team who had not previously been involved as leaders even entered new jobs and volunteer roles to get more involved in the community.

Heart & Soul Outcomes:

Monticello residents identified Education & Community Facilities as priorities during their Heart & Soul process. Using the Action Plan as an outline, the community created a team to lead a new school bond referendum. After failing with less than 50% three previous times, the referendum to construct a new middle school passed with over 70% approval, well above the 60% threshold needed for approval.

The Action Plan is also being used by a new “Hometown Pride” team that has helped steward processes forward, including recreational trail expansion, a new entrepreneur center, and celebrations downtown to showcase a new pocket park and refurbished buildings in the “Main Street” district.

