

Community Heart & Soul®

— Guided by what matters most —

CASCADE, IOWA

POPULATION: 2104

CHALLENGE:
Keep Cascade as a thriving community by involving more people in decision-making processes.

FOCUS: More inclusive input into decisions that will increase the quality of life in Cascade.

KEY TOOLS: Innovative community engagement events that reached new audiences.

Good connectors with ‘missing voices’ populations to gather stories.

Effective use of social media to spread the word about events, share stories, and get feedback about Heart & Soul Statements.

Excellent engagement by elected officials and city management.

Cascade is a small town that straddles Dubuque and Jones counties in rural Iowa. Surrounded by a thriving agricultural community, the town also boasts an impressive number of small businesses, manufacturers, shops, and restaurants. Situated on the north fork of the Maquoketa River, Cascade has many outdoor amenities, including a new pool, walking trails, riverside parks, band shells, and more. Residents are proud of the educational and childcare options in Cascade which include both private and public schools and a wealth of youth activities, including sports, 4-H, scouts, and more. The town has a growing Latino population that has supported school enrollment, cultural diversity, and workforce development at the farms and manufacturers in the region.

Cascade “by the numbers”:

- 708 residents engaged
- 143 survey responses from youth
- 16 meetings & community events
- 1400+ individual data points analyzed
- 15 Leadership team volunteers

Local conditions:

Cascade benefits from its location with easy access to several other larger towns (Dubuque and Cedar Rapids) which makes it an attractive place for families to benefit from life in a small town while maintaining easy access to the amenities and jobs that can be found in bigger cities. Cascade has a strong core group of active volunteers, but to keep the town active and vital they needed to find ways to engage new residents and get them involved, especially those who did not grow up in Cascade and the growing Latino community.

Volunteer and Community Response:

New residents who had not been especially active as volunteers before stepped up to help with Heart & Soul. Their connections with community groups, Latino residents, and school-age youth helped gather stories from a wide range of people. Several city council members and the city administrator served on the leadership team and provided a critical connection between the Heart & Soul work. Teachers and youth actively participated in the process through surveys and events, including involvement with the leadership team. As the team tried to wrap up their community engagement work in the deepest part of the pandemic lockdown, they used social media effectively to spread the word about their Heart & Soul Statements and priorities for action, including an engaging series of Facebook live interviews about how community groups are using the Action Plan to improve quality of life in Cascade. The Cascade City Council held a work session with Heart & Soul leadership to connect the priority actions identified by the community with the Council's priorities and budgeting process.

Heart & Soul Outcomes:

- Work session with CH&S team and City Council to align Heart & Soul Action Plan items with city budget and priorities.
- Downtown improvements have taken place, including murals, new planters, lighting, walking trail upgrades, new trash receptacles, new parking, and more.
- A new team has formed to work on planning, marketing, and fundraising for a new library. They got a \$1 million commitment from the County Board of Supervisors for the project.
- One of the Heart & Soul leadership team members who had not previously been involved in local politics was elected to the City Council.
- A new Innovation Lab opened in downtown Cascade with co-working space that will support start-up businesses and entrepreneurs.
- The City of Cascade has received several 'catalyst grants' that have funded public-private partnerships to restore prominent historic buildings in the downtown area.
- Downtown Cascade has seen a burst of new businesses starting in in the Main Street area, including restaurants, breweries, retail, and more.

