

Community Heart & Soul®

— Guided by what matters most —

AKRON and WESTFIELD, IOWA

Akron-Westfield Community Heart & Soul served residents within the Akron-Westfield Community School District in northwest Iowa including the communities of Akron (population 1,588), Westfield (population 130) and surrounding rural areas. Set within the scenic Loess Hills region and adjacent to the Big Sioux River, the area offers a variety of recreational opportunities. Downtown Akron is home to locally owned shops and dining options, as well as the historic Akron Opera House.

POPULATION:
2,900

CHALLENGE:
Strengthening
community
cohesion and
cross-town
partnership

FOCUS:
Downtown
development

KEY TOOL:
Community
summit

Akron and Westfield “By the Numbers”:

- **326** survey responses collected from community members
- **100+** attendees at the Community Action Roundtable event where resident input helped shape the community action plan
- **200+** residents gave feedback on draft Heart & Soul Statements
- **10** residents now serve on the board of the Akron & Westfield Growth Alliance, formed as part of Akron-Westfield Community Heart & Soul’s stewardship plan

Local Conditions:

A group of volunteers along with city and school district leaders, initiated Akron-Westfield Community Heart & Soul to strengthen community and build on positive momentum in the region. The goals were to foster community pride by highlighting community strengths and areas for improvement. There was a desire to bolster community cohesion in the region and find new opportunities for partnership between Akron and Westfield.

Volunteer and Community Response:

The volunteer Heart & Soul team raised awareness and collected input at a wide variety of community events, including a back-to-school pool party, the annual Great Akron Scarecrow Festival, the Festival of Trees, and the local farmers market. By integrating activities with existing community events, the team successfully met residents where they already were, enhancing outreach and participation. They also hosted a well-attended community roundtable event to review Heart & Soul statements and project ideas.

Partnerships were formed with representatives from the cities, school district, businesses and nonprofit organizations.

Heart & Soul Outcomes:

- Transformed a vacant downtown lot into a pocket park
- Established the **Akron & Westfield Growth Alliance**, a nonprofit dedicated to providing ongoing support, leadership and funding for projects that address community needs and priorities
- Launched the **GROW Challenge**, offering \$500 toward projects that meet community needs
- Energized several fundraising campaigns, including those for the **Akron Family Aquatic Center**, **Akron Trails project**, **Akron Opera House renovation**
- Improved dialogue and collaboration between key organizations and created pathways for residents to share ideas and take action

