Introduction

The PLACE Program in Williston, Vermont

The PLACE (Place-based Landscape Analysis and Community Education) Program is an innovative program in placed-based education for towns in Vermont provided by the University of Vermont (UVM) and Shelburne Farms. The PLACE program provides local residents with a forum for exploring and understanding the natural and cultural history of their town landscape. Working directly with local schools, town commissions, historical societies, and conservation organizations, PLACE staff members develop an integrated series of presentations, field trips, workshops, web-based, and printed materials designed to facilitate residents' understanding of the natural and cultural history of the local landscape.

Since its inception in 2001, PLACE has collaborated with a host of local and regional partners to facilitate programs in ten communities. In 2005, the PLACE program began experimenting with an institute model. The PLACE Institute coordinates service learners from UVM as they collaborate with local residents on place-based research and programming. In 2007, the PLACE program added an additional piece to the program offering while working with the town of Williston. Williston residents formed a task force to plan for a Vision to Action forum, titled Williston into the Next Generation (WING). The WING forum, which spanned a weekend in the spring of 2008, gathered over 100 residents together to share ideas about Williston’s future, identify specific projects for town improvement, and determine action steps to put those projects in motion.

The mission of the PLACE program is to promote a sustainable relationship between communities and their local landscapes by engaging residents in exploring, understanding, honoring and celebrating the natural and cultural features that contribute to their town’s character.

The goals of the PLACE Program are to:

- Encourage exploration and understanding of the local landscape by providing an engaging and accessible framework for residents to learn more about their town's natural and cultural heritage
- Showcase local knowledge and the efforts of individuals and organizations involved in local landscape stewardship and interpretation
• Facilitate the integration of place-based learning into schools by providing local educators with information, resources, and curriculum development support
• Support an informed and participatory community visioning process that builds upon an integrated interpretation of town landscapes and their transformation through time
• Provide meaningful service-learning opportunities for graduate students involved in landscape analysis
• Strengthen the sense of community identity and the connection between the past, present, and a sustainable future

Additional background information about the program in general, and Williston PLACE in particular, can be found at www.uvm.edu/place.

Evaluation Methods

In the spring of 2008, Shelburne Farms hired PEER Associates, Inc., an external evaluation firm, to conduct an evaluation of the Williston PLACE program. Williston PLACE was chosen as a key focus because of the program’s innovation at this site to engage the community at a new level through the Vision to Action Forum and its surrounding activities. Program staff and a key funder were identified as the primary stakeholders in the evaluation. This evaluation sought to understand several questions, including:

1. In what ways has Williston community members' enthusiasm about their community changed since Williston PLACE began?
2. In what ways has Williston community members' level of engagement in their community changed since Williston PLACE began?
3. In what ways has Williston community members' intentionality about creating change in their community changed since Williston PLACE began?
4. How do participants perceive the various aspects of PLACE (presentation series, educator involvement, Vision to Action forum, Steering Committee participation)? Do these multiple components complement, enhance, inhibit, or create synergy among each other? Are different outcomes associated with different types of participation? (Note: The extent to which we can answer to this last question is dependent upon the ways in which we can break down the survey data by groups, which may be dependent upon response patterns.)
5. What factors would continue to motivate community members' enthusiasm for and participation in their community?

In order to answer these questions, the external evaluators interviewed six key participants in Williston PLACE, and created a survey module that was inserted into three versions of an existing PLACE survey and administered to all community participants. Both of these data collection events occurred in July 2008. In summary, the PLACE program evaluation consisted of the following data sources:
• On-site evaluator observation of a WING Steering Committee Meeting
• **Interviews** with six participants, who fall into the following categories: (n=6)
  o one elementary school teacher
  o one middle school teacher
  o one multi-grade, multi-school enrichment teacher
  o two lifelong residents of Williston
  o one ten year resident
  o one twenty year resident
  o two residents of neighboring towns
  o three representatives of sponsor groups (who also participated in other aspects of the PLACE program)
  o participants in all aspects of Williston PLACE, from the educator institute, to the WING steering committee, to the public presentations and walks, to the WING Vision to Action Forum (and various combinations of the above)

• A written (computer-based) **survey** of community members who participated in one or more aspect of the PLACE program in Williston (n=31)

• Review of relevant **program documents** (program fliers, grant proposals, WING Report, WING meeting minutes) and past **evaluation documents** (Evaluation of Prosper PLACE, Evaluations of Richmond and Jericho PLACE)

• Review of local **publications**, including the *Williston Observer* (May, June, July, August), *Williston Resource Guide*

• Ongoing phone, email, and in-person **communication with key program staff** members

Interviews were conducted in May and June of 2008. Detailed field notes were taken during interviews and analyzed for emergent themes. Interviews were also recorded so that direct quotes could be extracted, and to allow multiple evaluation team members to review the data.

Surveys were administered in June of 2008. Quantitative survey data were analyzed to provide both descriptive (means) and inferential (correlations) statistics. Qualitative survey data collected through open-ended questions were organized along similar themes as those that emerged from the interviews. The survey module can be found in Appendix B.

This report summarizes key findings from the data. Conclusions and recommendations are found at the end of the report.

*A note to the reader about quotes: In some cases quotes are explicitly attributed because they came from interviewees. Where they are not attributed, quotes came from survey respondents.*
Findings and Discussion: Program Outcomes

The sections that follow thematically combine the findings from the surveys and the interviews. The themes are generally organized around the evaluation questions, with additional emergent themes expanded upon as well. The key themes described below include the following:

- Many participants were enthusiastic about their community and motivated to stay involved
- PLACE affected participants’ engagement in their community
- Participants held mixed views on diversity of PLACE participation
- Participants note some tangible results and anticipate more
- Educators (and community members) reported tangible results for students
- PLACE ignited intentions to both preserve and make change in Williston

All of these themes are discussed using numerical and open-response survey data, interviewee input, and evaluator discussion. Many of these key findings also have sub-themes that are described below.

**Many participants were enthusiastic about their community and motivated to stay involved**

The survey questions in Figure 1 were answered on the following scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Somewhat Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Somewhat Agree, 5=Strongly Agree. Hence, a response average of 4.1 means that across the entire sample, the average level of agreement with the statement was slightly stronger than “somewhat”.

Figure 1 provides the response averages for the enthusiasm items, ranked from lowest to highest average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a result of my participation in PLACE and/or WING...</th>
<th>Response average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...I am motivated to learn more about Williston’s natural history.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...I have an increased sense of pride in being a Williston resident.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...I have a stronger sense of belonging to the Williston community.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...I feel more motivated to get involved in shaping Williston’s future.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall moderate level of agreement to these items, with all the averages very close to “somewhat agree (=4.0)”, suggests that survey respondents would attribute modest changes in these areas to participation in the program. Motivation to learn more about Williston’s natural history was slightly less, on average, than the other items.
Asked to comment or provide more detail about the answers to the scaled items, a number survey of respondents expressed their pre-existing motivation and sense of community:

- I already felt pretty motivated about these things. That’s why I wanted to be involved.
- I already had a very strong sense of belonging to the community and a high level of pride in being a Williston resident.
- I believe all these attitudes existed prior to WING, but they were certainly reinforced by the program.
- I bet that I, like most participants already are active in the community.

These comments reflect that WING participants were a self-selected group of citizens seeking engagement, which provides some context for the modest changes recorded by the survey items above. Despite this, it is worth restating the finding above that participants do attribute a small increase to their enthusiasm as a result of program participation.

While the average responses on the survey demonstrate small impacts on the group as a whole, more notable impacts may be observed on the individual level, as evidenced by one educator’s remarks:

I’ve lived here 20 years and I’ve been a teacher here for 8 years, but this was the first chance of really feeling like I was getting to know the whole community…even though not everybody wanted the same things, there were lots of people who were looking for improving the future of the town and making this a stronger community…in a sense this is the first time in my life that I feel like a very key player in the community.

A lifelong resident very involved in the community remarked, “I do see and feel a renewed hope for Williston as a result of WING Vision to Action and that makes me feel good.” Echoing this enthusiasm, a Conservation Commission member said, “I think it brings you much closer to involvement and wanting to know more about your community. It’s exciting, it’s about changes that can happen.”

**Motivating current and engaging new participants**

Interviewees and survey respondents were asked what would help motivate them personally to stay involved in the initiatives that have emerged from PLACE/WING and what would motivate residents who had not yet participated. Very similar themes emerged from responses to these two questions, specifically:

- Communication,
- Visible Progress,
- Ongoing support from PLACE, and
- Other motivating factors.
Communication: publicity and personal outreach

Many survey respondents identified a need for ongoing communication and outreach through a variety of avenues, including the following:

- Public presence of the WING initiatives via regular articles and messages in
  - The Williston Observer, including the idea of a dedicated column
  - The Front Porch Forum, an on-line neighborhood list serv
  - The Burlington Free Press
  - School specific communications
- Targeted, personal invitations soliciting participation either in person or on the telephone, but not electronically
- Invitations to regular meetings and follow up events with specific action plans

A few of the interviewees felt that it was important to make sure the WING summary document gets widespread circulation in a timely manner. A Conservation Commission member said that she was “Looking forward to seeing that, because that’s [WING forum] the part that I see as the real jumping off point for what our hopes were when we said we wanted to make a commitment to do this PLACE program for the whole year...so as head of the Conservation Commission I want to take a look at that and read about what people said in other groups.”

A WING educator also suggested that some version of the WING summary report could be sent home with the students.

Visible progress on relevant issues

Numerous survey respondents were emphatic that clearly visible progress would be a critical motivating factor for themselves and others. Their comments are synthesized into the action points below:

- Identification and clear articulation of the recognizable steps toward the long term goals.
- Strong focus on immediate/short-term, attainable steps toward goals that are aligned with the “hot button” issues presently at the forefront of residents’ attention.
- Regular and widespread publicity around the attainment of these steps.
- Visibility of momentum, and palpable “buzz” around the projects will strengthen the motivation of participants and encourage new involvement.

The following direct quotes from survey respondents assist in emphasizing the need for such a plan:

- If I thought real changes would come from my participation, I might participate.
• We need to find ways to move forward and feel like we have momentum even if the big plan takes years and years.

• People are skeptical that their efforts would make a difference in a world gone madly bureaucratic.

• The issues we finally decided upon are not "burning issues" for me and I'm already involved in many community activities, so unfortunately, I don't have the time to commit right now.

**Ongoing support and engagement from PLACE**

Interviewees were asked specifically what sort of ongoing input from the PLACE program would help to keep program momentum going. Great appreciation for the program and program staff was evident throughout the interviews, and interest in further connections with PLACE was strong as a result.

As one steering committee member summarized, Williston residents would benefit from any and all support:

> Williston is in a tough spot [citing turnover of town officials], and likewise WING will be. I’m thinking that whatever Shelburne Farms and PLACE/UVM can do to shepherd us through this will be very important…. Whatever oversight and stimulation, even if it’s claps on the back, bravos and smileys, will be carrots to help and will be important.

Two members of the Conservation Commission suggested various forms of capacity building so that community members could continue to types of programs offered by PLACE, or continue to build their own knowledge. One suggestion was that UVM students or program staff could train willing Williston residents how to lead different natural history walks on the primitive trails. “I’m thinking of reaching the adults who need to know the importance of open space, to protect the environment,” concluded the Conservation Commission member. An educator present during the same interview added that

> …it’s a huge community building activity, where you make something accessible to people who either don’t know it’s there, or they don’t know enough about safety in the woods to feel like they could just go out. People who haven’t grown up in Vermont or who don’t spend a lot of time in the woods, but if they see in the paper or wherever that ‘oh somebody is going to be leading a walk’…that could be a really nice bridge.

An educator suggested that it could be very beneficial if UVM students or PLACE staff members could be linked with WCS classes for ongoing mentoring and project support. It was suggested that these relationships would be helpful even if they only lasted one semester. Another educator thought that follow up workshops with the educators themselves would be very important to keep the fire of place-based education burning among the many other competing demands.
The same educator highlighted the unique relationship between UVM and the Conservation and Planning Commissions, suggesting that further follow up and ongoing interaction would provide mutual benefits.

Additional technical support for the WING website was also suggested, including links with the PLACE website.

**Other motivating factors**

Less than half a dozen respondents cited each of the following additional factors:

- Strong leadership on committees; not all want to be planners and organizers
- Ongoing social events; potlucks and entertainment that strengthen personal connections and social capital
- Town involvement
  - Town staff support of committees and groups
  - Attention of the select board
  - Indications of town commitment such as investment in energy conservation

**PLACE affected participants’ engagement in their community**

Figure 2 illustrates the response patterns to the five survey items measuring increased engagement in community as a result of program participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a result of my participation in PLACE and/or WING, I more frequently...</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...talk about Williston current events with friends or family.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...attend community social events.</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...spend time in Williston’s natural areas.</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...attend public meetings and hearings on community issues.</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...participate in Williston school events.</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most notable finding from this set of survey items is the large percentage of respondents affirming that program participation had fostered greater discussion of local current events with friends and family. This confirms the aspirations of a steering committee member who said that “Our hope was that each person who came to WING would then talk about it to their group of friends and then they’d talk to other groups of friends.” This personal spreading of the word is just what was cited by many respondents as an important way to generate continued engagement in the processes set in motion by PLACE.

A majority of respondents also reported increased attendance at community social events. The strong negative response to participation in school events implies
something of a disconnect between the school and community aspects of PLACE, and suggests a significant opportunity for fostering greater community involvement in the school, and greater awareness for school involvement in the community.

Survey respondents were also asked to comment or provide more detail about the answers to the yes/no items. Even more strongly that in their comments to the enthusiasm items, respondents clarified that they already enjoyed a high level of engagement in the listed activities, and did not feel that program participation was responsible for a significant increase in that. The following quotes are representative of twelve fairly similar comments to that effect:

- I already enjoy my town in many ways and WING did not increase this.
- I'm pretty active in the community already and attend functions frequently...even before WING.
- [I] already spend a lot of time in the woods. [I] have kids and already participate in school events.

A few respondents mentioned that they do not attend school events as they have no children in school, and one respondent added “I believe schools are important, but presently overrated above other community needs like that of seniors.”

One educator who was not a resident of Williston remarked that while she did not feel as though she was involved in the town, as a result of participating she wanted to “make choices to have my students more involved in the town next year doing a project with the village,” because “…it's become very important to me that I want my students to know about the natural and cultural history of the town.”

Community involvement in the school
Survey respondents were asked if they felt comfortable acting as a community resource for Williston schools. Twenty responded “no” and nine answered “yes”. Respondents were asked to comment on their choice, and a number of themes emerged from their responses.

Most of the positive responses were very enthusiastic and reflected deep concern for education and recognition of the important role of a school in the community. As one respondent remarked:

I care greatly about education and I think outstanding educational programs and approaches have been one of Williston's greatest strengths in the past decade or more. I also believe parent and town involvement is critical to maintaining this strength.

In answering this question, some respondents clarified that they were town staff and commission members and felt that in those roles they had many useful resources they could make available to students.
Lack of time, lack of school age children, and lack of response to previous offers to help in the school were cited as reasons not to be involved.

On a process note, four respondents clarified that they did not understand the meaning of the term “community resource”, or felt unclear what acting as one would entail. Future versions of the survey should include rewording of the question or greater clarification of the term.

**Participants held mixed views on diversity of PLACE participation**

Survey respondents and interviewees were asked if they thought that the program had recruited new people into new areas of community change, or if it was just the same folks involved in the same kinds of activities as usual.

The data suggest a general consensus that the usual people involved in community affairs accounted for a majority of the participation, but that a smaller contingent of new people were also in attendance. Representative comments of opinions in agreement with the general consensus and on both sides are offered below.

**No new faces**

- Don’t think new people are stepping up...
- No, and most people are still pushing their agenda
- Most of the faces I saw were people who are already involved. But it did help me see that others would like to see the same kind of change I would like.

**Mix of old and new**

- A few new people may have been recruited into the areas of community change but mostly it is the same people who are involved at other levels of the community in one way or another.
- I definitely can see the expansion of the numbers of folks who are now working on some of the projects that came from the PLACE and WING activities.
- I believe that the program did encourage some new folks to get involved partly because several of the activities were new and there was an organized push to get people involved.
- My quick impression is that many, though not all, are the same folks - but I think WING has value in recommitting old faces, and I suspect some new have gotten more involved.
- I would say that I knew 60-70% of the people at WING, and the rest were new people.
- While I feel that I’m seeing all the familiar faces, I confess that half the people in my WING subcommittee are people I didn’t know before.
- I believe it has included the ones who have already been involved AND has welcomed others.
- There are more people getting involved but it is still a core group of people.
New faces

- Seems to be a new batch of people, or at least ones who were only minimally involved before.
- It seemed to attract people who had just moved to town, and maybe those people are always involved wherever they are, but it’s nice that they’re in Williston.
- Yes. I saw many new faces that are becoming very involved
- I have definitely seen new people involved with Williston issues and that is a good thing.

One respondent suggested that WING was a starting point to broader participation, and offered an interesting observation about one prominent community member:

I think it’s mostly incremental changes, helping hook up people who already want to work together in certain areas. Maybe newer people would get more involved now, after there was a great 'buzz' about the WING event. Conversely, I personally observed someone who has seen himself as a BMIW (Big Man in Williston) get kind of turned off in a discussion group when he felt how inclusive the conversation was.

An educator echoed the notion that participation would be likely to spread over time:

This is giving a chance for people who…haven’t been engaged in the town to become engaged on a smaller commitment level. There are people who aren’t willing to be involved on a committee but may be willing to help out with potlucks…. If we do these periodically, different people are going to start to come in because they are going to hear about it.

A steering committee member felt that it was important that the usual group of engaged community members were involved in the program:

For sure, there was a core group of us who were the same old same old, but in this situation it’s not a bad thing because it’s the people who get things done and move things. ‘The world is run by the people who show up.’ That’s not my quote, I don’t know who said it.

He elaborated that “there were a bunch of other people there who are not typically in that group,” and that the community outreach method that the steering committee was given to use “…really reached out to the cross section and I think we were successful. It wasn’t just the same old. We don’t have 80 some people showing up…on a regular basis to do anything.”

Another steering committee member agreed that they did reach a broad group, and had “good generational representation,” but felt that they could have done better with two demographics in particular:
It would have been nicer if there was some way to have reached more a diversified group on the west [Taft’s Corners] side of town.

I don’t know that there were enough of the older generation. I would have loved to have seen more people who have lived in Williston, had experience, or served on committees, and get their opinion about where we are going because they know where we’ve been.

Participants note some tangible results and anticipate more

Survey respondents and interviewees were asked if they had seen any tangible, noticeable results brought about by PLACE/WING thus far, and if so, to describe them. Program staff and evaluators who devised this question assumed that it is early in the process to note truly tangible outcomes (such as a community center being built, or a reduction in car traffic), but thought that participant responses could be a good indicator of intentionality and what changes may come in the future.

Judging from the data, respondents generally interpreted “tangible results” to appear in the form of physical evidence. “No” and “not yet”, and “too early to tell” were commonly expressed sentiments reflecting this interpretation. However, some community members took a broader view and noted an increase in civic engagement as a tangible result, while others observed student activities resulting from their teachers’ PLACE participation.

Some respondents had not seen results yet but were aware of future planned events such as the community potlucks and a concert series. One respondent noted “several tangible products” and cited one specific energy conservation project.

Two expressed disappointment about a lack of early results in specific areas:

I hoped by now we'd have audits of school and town buildings, but we're still just talking about fluorescent light bulbs.

Shouldn't there have been a bigger WING presence at the Fourth of July - Williston's stellar event?

As with many new initiatives, WING and PLACE were able to tap into and build upon a history of community endeavors. One respondent noted that “most of the potential projects identified were already in the works to varying degrees,” and another stated that “some pre-existing activities have been helped by an energy boost that came out of the program.” The comments of a steering committee member provide evidence for this:

…that group [the WING subcommittee] had the concern for a civic center in Williston, which had been fairly exhaustively examined by a selectboard-appointed committee who said “good idea, but not now.” As a result of WING, this group is re-starting that quest
to some degree, and they have gotten press and attention of the selectboard and town manager.

A number of respondents identified the work taking place in the committees as a tangible result of WING, and were not aware of observable changes yet emerging from that growing collaborative work. One survey responded wrote, “There are many meetings going on that are exploring more frequent opportunities and locations for Town residents to get together. There is much more collaboration between groups and new web-sites.” A steering committee member also noted greater collaboration, explaining that disparate efforts taking place in isolation “are now being pulled together and intersecting more.”

Another steering committee member and lifelong town resident offered the critical observation that by some measures, increased civic engagement could be the most meaningful outcome of WING:

> The need for change gets a lot of lip service…but not a lot may be able to be accomplished. I’m predicting WING will accomplish this all in a recordable, observable measure and the actual participation of the people may overshadow the actual physical results. It will be more important that everyone gets involved and starts doing stuff together…. The actual process is the most important and significant factor.

Reiterating the long view, one community member offered this reminder: “The changes we were talking about are BIG changes and that takes time.”

On that note, interviewees were asked to speculate what the impact of PLACE might look like five years into the future. Their responses included a number of tangible, physical outcomes:

- Creation of a community center
- Frequent community potlucks
- Better public transportation and alternative options
- Green initiatives and carbon reduction
- Safe routes to school for students on bikes and on foot

They also detailed a number of foreseeable civic outcomes:

- I hope that we can talk about more interaction among a wider membership in the community and more people involved. (Educator)
- I would say that the apathetic attitude of Willistonians toward their town, and their government, and their community—which is all of the above—will have all but disappeared and been replaced by not just a core group of people who are concerned about it. (WING Steering Committee member)
• I’m hoping that this kind of approach to the town’s future will preclude the having generational battles over “well, you know we’re putting too much money into the school and we don’t have any kids in school and what do we get back for it, why can’t we have some of that” so I see that as a real outgrowth. That would be one of my hopes that the things that we do could make sure that the different generations are in contact with each other. (Conservation Commission member)

Educators (and community members) reported tangible results for students

Because many Williston educators had been working with PLACE since January 2007, by the time the interviews were conducted, these educators were aware of the benefits to themselves and to their students as tangible outcomes of the program.

I’ve changed and that has a tangible result for my students…. I’m going to take every opportunity I have to make sure they understand what a really remarkable place, and really historic place, they live in. They are at these places all the time and just don’t have a sense of what these places are. I didn’t realize what a historic spot this is, and that change for me will change the opportunities for my kids.

I have students in my class who could lead walks on the Allen Brook trail. They know enough that they could talk about that tree – they could stand there with you and look at the beaver lodge and tell you about how the beaver lodge has changed over the year.

I don’t know a ton of information, but everything I know is what I learned in those [PLACE] workshops.

[There are] numbers of students in the school system here that wouldn’t [otherwise] know about all this and wouldn’t feel really engaged in it. That is a real boon and it does go home with them.

Educators recognized that a greater understanding of the nature of change was an important lesson for their students. As one educator related,

… the kids went back and thought about how big the tree was – a sense of length of time, connecting that there is a lot behind us…the way it is now isn’t how it always has been, and the way it is now isn’t how it is always going to be either.

PLACE also brought the benefits of place-based education to higher-needs students outside of the public school system. A Conservation Commission member recounted this story:

We worked with students from Pine Ridge School which was a really great experience for them because they’re dyslexic and this was hands-on thing. You didn’t have to read something, you were out doing things. Bringing those students into contact with a place-based education program was very helpful for them too.
Three survey respondents also observed student outcomes from PLACE, including students on a local historic architecture field trip, student art projects related to the WING forum, and integration of WING into the curriculum by educators.

**PLACE ignited intentions to both preserve and make change in Williston**

As a construct, intentionality to make change is deeply intertwined with much of what has been discussed above about enthusiasm, staying connected with the work of the program, and engaging in the community. As such, much has been said about intentionality already in this report. Nevertheless, survey items and interview questions were asked with the intent of further teasing out this construct, and the results of these lines of inquiry are discussed below.

Figure 3 provides the average responses to the community engagement items, ranked from lowest to highest. These items were answered on the following scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Somewhat Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Somewhat Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a result of my participation in PLACE and/or WING I intend to...</th>
<th>response average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...serve on a town board, commission, or committee.</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...get involved with an organization active in land stewardship or historic preservation in Williston.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...help educate the community about sustainability and reducing resource consumption.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...organize future community events intended to create change in Williston.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...communicate the vision of PLACE and WING to other community members.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The stronger intention to communicate the vision of PLACE and WING is congruent with the finding that participants talk more with their family and friends about the program, as reported above.

As with the other sections of scaled items, a few respondents echoed sentiments such as, “I already do almost all of the above and did so without the PLACE program. The PLACE program certainly helped reinforce my desire to continue doing these activities.”

One community member brought up an important point about the broad concept of “creating change” in the community, and the nuance of the language we use to talk about desired change:

> I have some issue with the wording of the 3rd statement. [4th in list above] There are many things I’d like to preserve, rather than change about Williston, and keeping up what we’ve already got is what’s behind my interest in WING.
Further evidence of intentionality is demonstrated in a tangible commitment made at the town level; the Conservation Commission’s intention to support the vision of PLACE was seen in their vote to contribute $150 to each of the five committees that came out of WING.

The intent to act on the activities described in the survey items was implicit in the ongoing roles of the interviewees in the Conservation Commission, WING steering committee, and school. The educators were most explicit in their plans to continue PLACE with their students and to help their students understand their roles as agents of change (or preservation) through a greater understanding of their place.

One educator described how she planned to change the focus of her students’ projects to have them connect with the community:

_In the past we started with kids’ interests and connected them to the community service component, but [since participating in PLACE] I’d like to begin with the needs in the community and then connect to the kids interests._

She explained that instead of having numerous projects about “soccer and snowboarding”, projects like a community food shelf would be more likely to come to fruition. During the interview, this educator invited the Conservation Commission member who was also present to come to her class in the fall: “I think it would be great for them to hear, ‘Here’s what’s gong on and here’s what would help.’”

An educator related that the “guiding question for students for the year’s curriculum was ‘how can we affect the future of our community?’” She explained how she hoped to ground her students in an expansive concept of place:

_Kids are looking at learning about their community, but also trying to find a way they could make something happen in the future so they could see how learning about their community was not just about looking at the past, or looking at what is, but thinking about what will be in the future._

When asked what stage they thought the PLACE program was in (e.g. beginning, middle, end), all the interviewees felt that the program was either at its beginning or at its middle, suggesting that they are taking a longer view. There was general agreement that work in the schools and the efforts evolving from the WING forum would continue into the future. As one educator described,

_I see it as informing the work that we’re continuing to do, so even though the active part of the program is finished, the website exists…and the classes that teachers have taken are going to continue to be a resource and will continue to inform their practices. And the WING component in the community will be a foundation that we can go back to and look at as we are moving forward._
Summarizing his thoughts about continued involvement, a steering committee member concluded, “…we do what we can and that’s what I intend to keep doing.”

Findings and Discussion: Program Processes
In this section, themes that emerged related to the process and implementation of the PLACE program are elaborated upon. These themes include:

- Synergy between different elements of PLACE
- Enthusiasm for the PLACE program
- Relationship between outcomes and “dose” of PLACE program
- Challenges and barriers

As with the above sections, these themes are discussed using numerical and open-response survey data, interviewee input, and evaluator discussion. Many of these key findings also have sub-themes that are described below.

Synergy between different elements of PLACE
Via the surveys and interviews, the relationship between the different elements of PLACE was explored through the following questions:

- The PLACE program is interested in learning about the ways in which the various components (i.e. presentation series, educator involvement, Vision to Action forum, Steering Committee participation) complement, inhibit, or enhance one other. Do you think that all of the different components of PLACE are necessary and useful? Would the program be just as strong if one or more of those elements were removed? Do you see the various elements complementing or creating synergy among one another? How so?
- Is it appropriate to link the educational emphasis of PLACE with community visioning and planning efforts? Why or why not?
- In what ways, if any, did your participation in Williston Geographic influence your WING experience?
- Do you have any final thoughts about integrating community visioning into the PLACE Program?

Survey respondents appeared to have varying understandings of what was intended by “educational emphasis.” As such, some people commented on the connections with Williston Central School, and others commented on the connection between Williston Geographic and WING.

Interviewees, who had more opportunity to elaborate their ideas, were enthusiastic about the multifaceted approach of PLACE. A Conservation Commission member affirmed that “all those components really put the program together comprehensively
and each one of them plays an element of the success of it,” and an educator concluded that “…each piece was necessary to bring us to where we are.”

**Linking Williston Geographic with community visioning**

Respondents generally felt that the educational emphasis of PLACE was meaningful to integrate with community visioning. Although there was some confusion around terms, and a number of respondents were unsure, comments were positive and mostly centered on the value of coming to an event such as WING with a sense of current and historical context.

The Williston Geographic sessions provided logical and essential preparation for the participation in the WING forum, according to a number of survey respondents and interviewees:

- It made me feel like something was going on, that WING didn't just come out of nowhere.
- In order to plan for the future, one must understand what has happened in the past. As people become more educated about the community's past, they are more likely to participate and the quality of their input is likely to rise.
- …for people to do the visioning they need the information, everyone needs to be given accurate information and then asked thoughtful questions. (Educator)
- …the presentations that they did were a real education for me… we looked at where we've been but then also really took that and said, 'What is it we really value and what do we do in the future to ensure that this is a really viable exciting place to live?' (Conservation Commission member)
- If you don’t know where you’ve been, how are you going to know where you’re going? You’ve got to study, you’ve got to know what has transformed to make us get here and what can we do to make us go forward. (Conservation Commission member)

For two survey respondents in particular, participation in Williston Geographic helped them put themselves as individuals into the bigger picture:

- I did shift how I see myself as a Williston resident – not just a dangling newcomer to VT, but in a historical context.
- As part of WING I felt as though I am also a person in People and the Williston Landscape.

Two respondents commented on specific applications of the connections between the two types offerings:

- It is helpful to see the soils map in regards to planning.
- …political and governmental decisions should be grounded in the landscape analysis.
Furthermore, the Williston Geographic events provided participants with motivation toward participation at the forum. As one survey respondent indicated, “I think [attending Williston Geographic] helped motivate me to attend the larger community event.” An educator provided a richer analysis of how this may have worked:

_The evening presentations were key: people could just come and not be committed to anything, they could just be interested and sit there and learn new things…if you just went away after being there from 7-9 pm and learned some new stuff, that was fine, but there was also a chance to get involved more beyond that. I think that is an excellent way to hook people but not tell them, ‘Oh, by the way, we are expecting x number of hours of volunteer labor.’ That came around when WING was introduced and I thought they had a pretty good turnout for that._

It is worth noting that the emphasis that PLACE puts on taking a proactive rather than reactive approach was acknowledged by both participants and program staff. While this was not explored in great depth with respondents, a Conservation Commission member highlighted the notion that PLACE is more of a preventative approach than a defensive one, saying,

_I don’t think anybody came to the WING weekend with transportation pros and cons about the circ highway. They didn’t come bringing up old negative problems in town, they came to hear and listen and I think they knew that it was to plan for the future in Williston. [The PLACE staff] hoped that in the individual committees that the critical issues of the past wouldn’t be coming up, and that didn’t happen. Everybody was on the same track of planning the future of Williston and what would be the best._

Connecting the schools with PLACE

A number of survey respondents understood the question of educational emphasis to be about implementing PLACE at the local schools. One person was very supportive of this and enthusiastically reported, “Students can become the greatest advocates for positive change and dedicated supporters for what makes our town so great so far.” Others sounded notes of caution including concerns that “…people without kids in the school system care more about educating adults,” and “…many people thought this was a Williston Central School event which may have been a deterrent to some.”

Interviewees were unanimously enthusiastic about implementation of PLACE in the schools, and their remarks about this component of PLACE are found in other sections of this report.

**Enthusiasm for the PLACE program resounded**

It is worth noting that respondents expressed a clear appreciation for the PLACE program in their community. The following quotes illustrate this finding:
• Working with [the PLACE director] and the [UVM] students was just phenomenal. It was so impressive what the students uncovered and the preservation of historical stuff that a lot of us who haven’t live here all our lives don’t know…. They had pictures of things the way they used to be. They really were teaching us about the umbrella view of this town. (WING Steering Committee member)

• I loved how open-ended the whole thing was [WING]. The feeling that we could make it whatever we wanted it to be. It did involve an awful lot of work. People are so busy, it’s amazing that so many people came. (Community participant)

• I think this is sort of a dream come true for a lot of us on the Conservation Commission. (Conservation Commission member)

• [What I liked about PLACE was that] it’s not an agenda. I’m not talking about turning my kids into a bunch of environmentalists, I’m not talking about indoctrinating my students, I’m training them to use the info from the past to think about the future. It’s something they need to be trained how to do and very few teachers would argue with that. What [the PLACE director and other PLACE staff] conveyed was that PLACE was an opportunity, it was a resource to provide opportunities for the kids, and there was not some a rigid curriculum that we were being given to follow. They did a really nice job. One of them used the phrase ‘getting back to teaching the way/ for the reasons you got into teaching in the first place’ – that struck me. It’s about really educating kids and being able to relate what you’re teaching…it’s just really motivating. (Educator)

• I never felt with the community workshops and field trips that there was an agenda other than to educate me, and that was really important to me. Actually, as an educator I feel really a fine line of not wanting to indoctrinate my kids with my beliefs. For me I always try to take the bent of just educating them, giving them information and asking them questions that will make them think, and I feel like that is what this program did. I never felt that something was being crammed down my throat. (Educator)

**Relationship between outcomes and “dose” of PLACE program**

The survey data were analyzed to determine if any relationship existed between responses to the survey items and a participant’s degree of exposure, or “dose” of the PLACE program. It was also of interest to examine whether different outcomes were associated with different levels of participation (e.g. forum participant, steering committee member, community sponsor).

No statistically significant relationships were found between outcomes and program dose. There are a number of possible explanations for this finding. The first is that a large number of survey respondents were already at a high level of enthusiasm, engagement, and intention to act, and as such they reported very little change as a result of participation. Another important consideration is that the measure of program exposure is crude, and may not accurately reflect a participant’s degree of participation.
Statistically significant differences between outcomes for different groups were not found, but the numbers of surveys involved were too small to consider this a meaningful finding.

In order to attempt to statistically describe the relationship between outcomes and program dose, it is likely that more nuanced measures of outcomes, a more thorough measure of program exposure, and a much larger number of surveys would be required.

An explanation of the statistical analysis is found in Appendix A.

**Challenges and barriers**

While the evaluation did not explicitly seek to understand barriers to implementation of the PLACE program, a number of themes and ideas emerged around this topic and are summarized here.

Educators commented on the difficulty of overcoming the impression of many of their fellow faculty members that place-based education could fall into the category of a burdensome add-on to their required teaching load:

> Good, hardworking, really caring teachers, who certainly had an open mind definitely had a sense that place-based education is just one more thing that we have to do…and not realizing that it’s really not a thing as much as it is an orientation. It is doing what you have to do anyway, it’s just a way of thinking about what you have to do. Because of that they were all excited about the course, but because we have constant initiatives thrown at us, then they came back and the reality hit, and not that many people went to the community education stuff. For those who did, the ones who sustained, I think it really had an immediate impact on the kids.

> There has to be a way to get more teachers really involved and convey that sense that we’re not talking about something new for you to do, we’re thinking about what you’re already doing in a way that will really benefit your kids in the long term.

One educator recalled a planning meeting with the whole PLACE staff, the administrators, and some of the educators, and thought that

> …if they could have done that with the whole school faculty…there would have been more people coming at it with a different mindset because [Shelburne Farms staff] did such a nice job describing what we’re talking about and what we’re not talking about. We’re not talking about you learning a new curriculum, we’re not talking about a thing, we are talking about an attitude.

Other barriers worth considering, but elaborated in less detail included:
• The logistical challenges imposed by Williston’s frequent turnover of town staff (e.g. the town planner, environmental planner, etc.)
• Transportation challenges could be detrimental to the ongoing participation of senior citizens.
• Some residents felt motivated to participate in PLACE events, but lacked time or faced scheduling conflicts.
• One steering committee member felt over-extended already and expressed hesitance towards deeper involvement. Other participants noted the high risk of burnout by those heavily involved at the outset.
• Educators noted that there is always considerable competition for educators’ time and areas of focus.
• The school’s grade-level structure, and general organization, might not be conducive to program sustainability.

Finally, two surveys were collected from people who had not participated in PLACE, but who shared opinions about both PLACE and Williston in general. Their responses are fairly negative, and as such present a challenge to the program. A synopsis of their input is provided in Appendix D.

Conclusions

Based on the evidence from surveys and interviews, PLACE seems to have catalyzed and coordinated existing community projects and priorities, and to have energized the core citizens involved. At the same time, by introducing the participation of new people, PLACE is helping Williston to create a new and more inclusive arena of civic engagement aimed at bringing diverse community members together with the common purpose of working toward a future grounded in an understanding of the landscape and its human and natural history.

While many of the participants came to PLACE already very enthusiastic about, motivated for, and engaged in learning about and working for the benefit of their community, the data suggest that they came away from PLACE events even more so. The task now for this committed group of citizens is to continue to draw in wider participation to bring forth not only action but results from the vision.

Synergy between the different elements of the PLACE program helped to increase participation and foster a more informed level of dialogue. Further value could be extracted by creating additional, explicit links between elements of the program that would result in lasting partnerships between various elements of the community.

While the programmatic commitment of the PLACE program is complete, it is likely that program outcomes could be sustained and enhanced with further inputs. Capacity building, educator professional development, and general ongoing contact and support...
would help to more firmly establish the civic processes put in place, and the practice of place-based education in the schools.

With its multifaceted approach to community engagement, the PLACE program has had a meaningful impact on the town of Williston, with many of the outcomes yet to emerge. A lifelong resident, reflecting on PLACE and another previous community effort, painted a promising picture for the future:

*I feel progress has been made and I see more progress on the horizon. I see an opportunity to move forward in a community way toward what people want Williston to be…. There is good evidence that we can come together, and have done so for other projects, and this can continue with this WING effort. The community got motivated, and it was an amazing community effort. That can continue happening here. I’m seeing the stirring.*

**Recommendations**

Respondents provided suggestions for program improvement, and the evaluators’ analysis provides insight into additional opportunities for program enhancement. The recommendations are sorted into the following sub-categories: recommendations for WING moving forward, recommendations for working with the schools, general program implementation recommendations, recommendations related to ongoing program support, and those specific to program content. As with any program, financial and staff resources will and should shape prioritization of any recommendations.

**For WING as it moves forward**

- Each WING committee should emphasize personal (e.g. word of mouth) and systemic (e.g. posting fliers in senior living complexes) outreach efforts to draw in new participants.
- Each committee should identify and work toward short term goals. Marking small milestones by communicating widely about and celebrating progress can help to enhance community buy-in, motivate other committees, and recruit new participants. Communication efforts might be geared at local venues such as the email list serv Front Porch Forum or the Williston Observer, might be covered by the Burlington Free Press, and could be showcased at the ongoing potluck series.

**For working with the schools**

- In order to help dispel the sense that involvement will mean adding too much new content and curriculum, work to increase educator recruitment by explaining the interdisciplinary and integrative nature of place-based education.
- Do more community outreach through the schools by adding PLACE components to events like parent/teacher nights, open houses, etc.
- Assure that both elementary schools (Allen Brook and Williston Central) are reached out to with equal measure.
• Work to establish more connections between Williston’s seniors and students through activities such as mentoring or service-learning projects like oral histories.

Program implementation
• Clearly and simply communicate the comprehensive vision and implementation strategy of PLACE to all participants at all event from the beginning. Include a synopsis of how the different program elements work together.
• Do the evening presentations in a variety of locations around Williston to draw in different populations and to bridge what some perceive as an east-west divide in Williston. Suggested venues include both elementary schools, Maple Tree Place, and senior citizen facilities.
• Engage all the town department heads in the program to broaden the impact on town operations. Motivated and excited town government servants have great potential to facilitate the work of the program.
• Offer clear and up-front clarity about stipends that may exist for participating educators and presenters. Community members who are asked to develop and deliver presentations within their realm of expertise may expect or be entitled to compensation for their time and service.
• Continue to emphasize PLACE’s orientation toward proactive about community concerns, responsive to the individual community, positive in its focus, and agenda-free from the outset.

Ongoing program support
• Provide periodic follow up support to the Conservation and Planning Commissions. Members suggested that they would like to begin running their own series of walks-and-talks programs, but that strategic help (and even specific trainings) from PLACE staff would be welcome and motivational.
• Follow up with educators following the formal program’s conclusion, including providing ongoing professional development for existing and new participants in the schools, as well as building communities of practice so participants can network and share ideas.
• Acknowledge the importance of the UVM-provided Williston PLACE website to the town (and, in particular, to the teachers) and assure that it is accessible and maintained with current information.

Program content
• During the Williston Geographic series, be sure to emphasize the “people” aspect of the landscape story. In particular, respondents suggested that they were left wanting more information about how people affected the changes that were being described, and more specifics about key people or families who affected change or altered the landscape as we know it.
• One attendee described what an important concept the phrase “sense of place” was to him when he discovered it in another forum years ago. He suggested, though, that not describing this concept during Williston Geographic was a “missed opportunity” to deepen the personal meaning behind the natural and cultural history exploration, and exploring this idea would help tie together the elements of the program.

• “Harness kid energy and pride in their town to motivate this process,” advised one educator. There were several suggestions that bringing out the student voice more resoundingly (for instance, during Williston Geographic, during a WING Forum, via Public Service Announcements, etc.) would bring more people together for PLACE functions, and ultimately help to shape people’s perception of their town.
Appendix A: Explanation of Statistical Analysis

The hypothesis that greater exposure to the PLACE program would yield stronger outcomes was explored through the use of inferential statistics.

For analysis, the survey items were grouped into indices that were thought to represent larger latent constructs, such as “enthusiasm” or “intentionality to make change.” Combining individual items into indices improves the odds that potential problems with the survey instrument or analysis or other measurement error will cancel each other out, making us more confident in the broader patterns that result. It also serves to reduce the data to make it more readily communicated.

The indices were tested for reliability, which is a measure of how well the survey items “hang together”. In other words, reliability measures to what degree survey respondents answer a group of items in a similar way, giving a measure of how much sense it makes to lump those items together as an index.

The statistical measure of reliability is called Cronbach’s alpha. An alpha of >.7 is considered to be acceptable in social science research. The four “enthusiasm” items yielded an alpha of .81 and the five “intentionality toward change” items yielded an alpha of .79. Although the sample size is fairly small (n=30) this preliminary analysis suggests that the indices are valid constructs and can be used for descriptive and inferential statistics.

The level of engagement can’t be made into an index as they are yes/no questions, but a score was tabulated for each respondent by adding up the number of yes answers.

The “dose” of the PLACE program was calculated by adding up the number of evening presentations and field trips attended. It was assumed that all respondents attended the WING forum. The dose varied from 0 to 6. The limitation of this measure is that it does not account for other PLACE related events such as committee meetings.

Statistical analysis examining the correlation between dose of PLACE and measures of enthusiasm, engagement, and intention to act did not yield any statistically significant relationship.

Comments on the survey revealed that most participants already enjoyed high levels of enthusiasm and engagement in their community, and as such, made measuring increased in these constructs more subtle.
Appendix B: Participant Interview Guide

Williston PLACE
Interview Guide
July 2008

Introduction to interviews:

- We are outside evaluators with PEER Associates, hired by Shelburne Farms to evaluate the Williston PLACE Program.
- The main purpose is to get your perspective about the program and its effects in your community.
- This is NOT a performance assessment.
- Your responses are confidential in that names are never used. Quotes are used. Only evaluation staff will see raw data.
- Your participation is voluntary, and you can stop at any time without any negative consequences.
- Data from these interviews will be analyzed and written up in a report that we'll give to Shelburne Farms by October, 2008, and they will share the reports with the community and PLACE partners.
- Request permission to record, take notes.
- Questions or concerns?

1. Introductions, including interviewee’s role(s) that may be connected to PLACE such as their job or other forms of community engagement.

2. What kind of involvement have you had in the PLACE program? (Steering Committee, attend evening/weekend, educator program, sponsor role, V to A forum, etc.) Do you live in Williston? What got you interested and involved to start with?

3. Do you feel any differently about your town or community since you began participating in PLACE activities? In what ways? Have you have gained new knowledge about your town? Have you gained new enthusiasm about where you live?

4. The PLACE program aims to balance a few things: to deepen community members’ knowledge about their place, enhance people’s enthusiasm, and generate positive action. If you had to choose, would you say that PLACE in Williston has been more about deepening knowledge, enhancing people’s enthusiasm, or generating action?

5. Are you personally more active or engaged, less active, or at the same level of engagement with your community since PLACE began in Williston? How so? Are you engaged in different types of activities than in the past?

6. Do you have a sense that others’ level or type of engagement in their community has changed? In other words, do you have a sense that there is a greater mobilization of the Williston community, or is it just the same folks involved in the same kinds of activities as usual?

7. Have you seen any tangible, quantifiable results yielding from PLACE (e.g. have new town improvement projects been implemented, new types of curriculum connections to the community happening with students in school, etc.)? What about the intention to create change: has that changed? How so? Are there plans in the works?
8. If I were to ask you five years from now, what kinds of changes, if any, do you see in Williston’s landscape, processes, or people, what do you think you would say? Do you think you will be able to attribute those changes (all or in part) to the work of PLACE and WING? What will the PLACE program have offered Williston if it is a “success” here?

9. The PLACE program is interested in learning about the ways in which the various components (i.e. presentation series, educator involvement, Vision to Action forum, Steering Committee participation) complement, inhibit, or enhance one other. Do you think that all of the different components of PLACE are necessary and useful? Would the program be just as strong if one or more of those elements were removed? Do you see the various elements complementing or creating synergy among one another? How so?

10. Where would you say Williston is with respect to the PLACE project—the beginning, middle, end?

11. What would help motivate you personally to stay involved in the initiatives begun via PLACE?

12. What do you suspect would help others stay motivated? What would it take to draw in and motivate the “uninitiated” in Williston—those people who have not yet played an active role in PLACE events or activities?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

    Thanks for your time.
Appendix C: Community Member Survey Module

PLACE Surveys - Community Engagement Module

As a result of my participation in PLACE and/or WING....
(scaled response)
1. ...I have a stronger sense of belonging to the Williston community.
2. ...I have an increased sense of pride in being a Williston resident.
3. ...I feel more motivated to get involved in shaping Williston’s future.
4. ...I am motivated to learn more about Williston’s natural history.

5. Please comment on or provide more detail about any of your answers above.

6. What would help motivate you personally to stay involved in the initiatives that have emerged from PLACE (or get involved if you have not yet done so)?

7. What do you think would draw in and motivate the Williston residents who have not yet participated in PLACE events or activities?

As a result of my participation in PLACE and/or WING, I more frequently
(scaled response)
8. ...attend public meetings and hearings on community issues.
9. ...spend time in Williston’s natural areas.
10. ...attend community social events.
11. ...talk about Williston current events with friends or family.
12. ...participate in Williston school events.

13. Please comment on or provide more detail about any of your answers above.

14. Do you think that PLACE has recruited new people into new areas of community change, or is it just the same folks involved in the same kinds of activities as usual? Please explain why or why not.

15. Have you seen any tangible, noticeable results brought about by PLACE thus far (e.g. have new town improvement projects been implemented, are school children learning more about their community at school, etc.)? If so, please describe them.

16. Do you feel comfortable acting as a community resource for Williston schools? (YES/NO)

As a result of my participation in PLACE and/or WING I intend to...
(scaled response)
17. ...serve on a town board, commission, or committee.
18. ...help educate the community about sustainability and reducing resource consumption.
19. ...organize future community events intended to create change in Williston.
20. ...get involved with an organization active in land conservation or historic preservation in Williston.
21. ...communicate the vision of PLACE and WING to other community members.
22. Please comment on or provide more detail about any of your answers above.
Appendix D: Outlying Voices: Synopsis of responses from two non-participants who completed surveys

Curiously, there were two respondents who filled out the survey although they had not participated in PLACE or WING except for one of the two having attended the beginning of one meeting. These data are not presented in the body of the report because neither the intentions of the evaluation nor the survey instrument were designed to capture the input of non-participating citizens. This information, however, is discussed in the appendix because the skeptical feedback provided by these two survey respondents may be worth briefly exploring in light of the inclusive intent of PLACE.

One of the respondents expressed considerable bitterness, especially about Williston Central School, and felt that PLACE encouraged the participation of only a select segment of the population. Comments from this respondent included:

- I would like to be involved, but as I said before why waste my time. Only the voices of the elite are heard the rest are placated.
- Williston only hears what it wants to hear and goes along with how it wants people to think.
- I went to one meeting and realized that I had different thoughts and ideas that were not welcomed.

The second non-participating respondent was more measured in his responses, and presented a more articulated skepticism about the “agenda” behind PLACE. This person’s comments included:

- Vague sense (I have no idea of the validity of my suspicions) that there is a political agenda behind WING, namely that the program’s agenda is being driven by ecology/educational elites. The program certainly has an agenda being led by academic ‘hired guns’. This always gives the business man in me the heebie jeebies.
- I wish I felt more comfortable with who is doing the ‘inviting in’ and what the agenda is. Williston is one of a handful of towns where businesses aren’t vilified for practicing capitalism. The program gives a more than a whiff of ‘social steering’. Who is at the wheel? What are their beliefs? Who is on the board of WING? Where is the funding coming from?
- How do you improve community perceptions that this isn’t a captive forum for a politically motivated elitist minority to gather the perception of community support for their own activist agenda?

Whatever the truth may be regarding these attitudes, the fact is that these perceptions of PLACE (and of Williston) exist in the community. These two respondents represent an unknown portion of the population, and while it is certain that there are those who
would never participate (for a variety of reasons) in a program like PLACE, it always worth seeking to understand what the barriers are to wider participation.

Appendix E: Williston PLACE Evaluation Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Evaluation Questions and/or Descriptions</th>
<th>Evaluation Strategy/Activity</th>
<th>Personnel Accountable</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Approx. % of eval plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Surveys</td>
<td>* In what ways has Williston community members' enthusiasm about their community changed since Williston PLACE began?</td>
<td>a) Develop survey module (i.e. 10 to 20 questions to insert into existing community surveys; not to replace or alter existing surveys). Provide to Walter or PLACE staff to upload survey monkey. Roughly 100 people to be surveyed via 2-3 survey templates; this module identical in each.</td>
<td>Andrew (AAP), Amy (ALP)</td>
<td>June/July</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* In what ways has Williston community members' level of engagement in their community changed since Williston PLACE began?</td>
<td>b) Administer surveys to participants, including follow up prompts to increase response rate.</td>
<td>Walter, PLACE staff</td>
<td>Jun/Jul</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* In what ways has Williston community members' intentionality about creating change in their community changed since Williston PLACE began?</td>
<td>c) Clean, organize, analyze survey data.</td>
<td>AAP, ALP</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interviews</td>
<td>* How do participants perceive the various aspects of PLACE (presentation series, educator involvement, Vision to Action forum, Steering Committee participation)? Do these multiple components complement, enhance, inhibit, or create synergy among each other? Are different outcomes associated with different types of participation? (Note: The extent to which we can answer to this last question is dependent upon the ways in which we can break down the survey data by groups, which may be dependent upon response patterns.)</td>
<td>d) Develop interview guide.</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e) Set up interviews with key participants.</td>
<td>PLACE staff</td>
<td>Jun/Jul</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f) Conduct interviews with +/- 3 key PLACE participants. Focus group or individual interviews; phone or in person. Notes, not transcribed.</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>early July</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>g) Analyze qualitative data, triangulate with survey module data. Write informal, white paper report.</td>
<td>AAP, ALP</td>
<td>due October</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Observation</td>
<td>* What factors would continue to motivate community members' enthusiasm for and participation in their community?</td>
<td>h) Attend, observe, and meet participants at WING follow up event.</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Program Staff Support</td>
<td>* What are realistic expectations and plans for generating useful evaluation results within existing resource constraints?</td>
<td>i) Revise current &amp; develop future evaluation overview.</td>
<td>ALP, AAP</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Meetings, email, conversations with staff to maximize value from evaluation activities.</td>
<td>j) General, on-going support for utilization of evaluation results and program documentation.</td>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Integrating plans with budgets, accounting.</td>
<td>k) Administrative and financial management support.</td>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>