The Community Leadership Handbook (2006) is a practical resource to return to throughout the community building and leadership journey. Kryle, Curphy, and Lund (2006) organize the book around three core competencies for community leadership: framing ideas, building social capital, and mobilizing resources. Tools to understand and develop each of the three core competencies are included including worksheets, activities, and guides for leaders and their teams. This handbook is beneficial for developing and guiding the work of community teams and leaders.

Participants of Minnesota’s renowned Blandin Community Leadership Program (BLCP) are trained to identify and build upon these core competencies. As a BLCP alum, I highly recommend this book with or without the formal Blandin training. It is a valuable resource for novice and seasoned community development leaders.

Easterling (2012) uses case studies from two civic leadership programs, the Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI) in Wisconsin, and largely the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), to illustrate the fact that simply educating community leaders is not enough to develop healthy communities. Ironically (but not surprisingly) culture, one of the aspects of communities that the ALI and KLC programs trained leaders to change was also the biggest obstacle standing in the way of change. Equipping local leaders with leadership skills, but releasing them to non-receptive communities, or to other leaders that do not share the same language of leadership, severely slowed progress. Easterling (2012) points out that individual leadership development needs to align with local changes in the community (p. 63). Local and state level leadership organizations need to work simultaneously to develop civic leaders and work with business, political, and governmental leaders to promote a shift in the culture’s thinking: from dependence to engagement, from apathy to responsibility, and a focus on building trust.

The KLC leadership model centers around five skills entitled, “Competencies for Civil Leadership,” which are 1. Diagnose situation, 2. Manage self, 3. Intervene skillfully, 4. Energize others (p. 56). Additionally, the core
principals that drive the work of KLC are that leadership is an activity, not a position; leadership is inherently risky; progress means doing what is needed in the situation rather than what is comfortable for ourselves or others; and we have to raise the heat to push ourselves and others to a zone of productive work (p. 63).

This article pushes community leadership developers to understand that their work may need to extend beyond the individuals in their programs. The four “Competencies of Civil Leadership” provide a framework for community leaders to help shape their day-to-day skills. Both the ALI and KLC programs are worth investigating further by all stakeholders.


Boehm and Staples (2012) interviewed community leaders with grassroots beginnings to find patterns in their unique pathways to becoming leaders, development of leadership skills, and interactions with group members (p. 78). Sixteen participants were from social action based organizations, and seven participants were from community development based organizations (p. 82). Each leader had a unique pathway to becoming a leader however each started in volunteer (grass roots) roles and followed a career path involving increasing
responsibility (p. 90). Skill development was first developed through experiential learning before institutionalized learning (p. 91). The leaders prominently cited small task groups as the vehicle for deepening relationships, reciprocating influence, creating shared vision, and fostering cooperative problem solving. The leaders recognized that community activities are too complex to handle alone, necessitating and valuing collaborative group processes (p. 92-93).

After the decision to become involved in grass roots leadership, leaders can often be unsure of their skills and balk at the uncertainties that lie ahead. Boehm and Staples (2012) provide insight into successful leaders who had similar beginnings to new leaders, giving hope and reassurance that each leader’s journey is different. Pointing out similarities gives direction to new leaders and their development, and provides direction to leadership trainers.