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Building community capacity and social infrastructure through landcare : a case study of land grant engagement / Courtney E. Kimmel ...

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Abstract

In the struggle to remain true to their technical assistance and civic engagement missions in an era of shrinking budgets and increasingly complex accountability claims, land grant universities have developed different engagement strategies to contribute to the development of surrounding communities. Drawing on Flora and Flora's (in Ann Am Acad Polit Soc Sci, 48, 1993) assertion that a strong and ?entrepreneurial? social infrastructure is critical for facilitating lasting change and development in communities (particularly rural communities), this article presents a case study of a land grant university's engagement with a community landcare group from the perspective of building social capacity in surrounding communities. This case explores Virginia Tech's involvement in facilitating and supporting Catawba Landcare using three theoretical frames?Ronald Heifetz's concept of ?holding environments? as a safe and facilitated space where social learning can occur; ecological and social entrepreneurship and the roles and functions required to support these forms of entrepreneurship; and the concept of learning action networks in which otherwise disparate partners are linked under common goals and collectively learn how to manage the situation at hand. Using these three theoretical frames, this paper posits landcare as a model of engagement for land grant universities thus contributing to the construction of social infrastructure.(HRK / Abstract

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