



# Community Leader

Blandin Community Leadership Programs Newsletter

Volume 6 No. 3  
Fall 2007

**Community Leader** is a quarterly exchange for news, learning and connection published by the Blandin Foundation leadership programs for those engaged in the effort to develop and sustain healthy communities.

Please visit **Community Leader Online** at [www.communityleader.wordpress.com](http://www.communityleader.wordpress.com)

Jim Hoolihan  
*President*

Valerie Shangreux  
*Leadership Director*

Malissa Bahr  
*Recruitment Manager*

Staff  
Becky Adams  
Trisha Zimmerman  
John Weyer

Blandin Foundation  
100 N. Pokegama Avenue  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744  
Phone: 218.326.0523  
Toll Free: 877.882.2257  
mjbahr@  
blandinfoundation.org

## A learning community is a community that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future.

By: Cindy Wilcox, BCLP Trainer

### Leader as Learner

As community leaders – those willing to help create and sustain healthy communities – we are constantly asking ourselves, “What exactly do we need to be doing?”

It’s a good question. We’ve all read about the many leadership skills required of us – effective communication, decision-making, self-awareness, ability to form and sustain relationships, ability to help others align around specific goals, etc.

A less frequently talked about but nonetheless important skill set involves learning. We tend to think of learning as acquiring new information or skills, but it is bigger than that. Learning for leaders involves a fundamental shift from seeing problems as caused by someone or something “out

there” to understanding how we contribute to the problems we experience. In the best learning communities, leaders are continually discovering how they create their own reality, and what they can do to change it.

### Types of Learning

Adult learning scholars have long distinguished among several different types of learning.

One type of learning known as “single loop” involves the detection and correction of error. When something goes wrong, single loop learning involves looking for another strategy that will address and work within the same assumptions and context. An alternative response is to question the underlying assumptions themselves; to subject them to critical scrutiny. This is described in the literature as double-loop learning.

Ron Heifetz distinguishes between learning that addresses



continued on page 7

## In this Issue...

Leader as Learner . . . . .	1&7
Community Leader Online . . . . .	2
Leadership Toolbox . . . . .	2
Leadership Notes and News . . . . .	3

Blandin Foundation Welcomes New Director of Leadership . . . . .	4
The Team Players . . . . .	5
Framing: A Community Example . . . . .	6
CPL to be piloted in October . . . . .	8

# Community Leader Online

## - A New Leadership Connection

The Blandin Foundation's leadership programs are designed to help current and emerging leaders further develop the skills, knowledge and relationships they need to build and sustain healthy community.

During the course of the last two-plus decades, the Foundation has developed numerous leadership programs to fulfill those goals. But, as it has often been said in BCLP: "Leadership is a journey, not a destination."

At the beginning of this year, the Community Leader editorial team developed a plan to help rural leaders on their journey long after the BCLP cohort experience ends. That plan included revamping Community Leader from a newsletter to a leadership resource.

Since this publication was reinvented, it is likely that you have noticed some changes in content. Our cover story, which explores one of the eight dimensions of healthy community, includes a list of additional resources. The new Community Leader also features a toolbox in each edition with specific tips for enhancing leadership skills in a specific dimension area. And, each edition contains an article on framing, building social capital and mobilizing resources (the three core competencies of leadership) around one of the eight dimensions of healthy community.

The revamped Community Leader, however, was just the beginning of an enhanced effort to provide our alums with life-long learning opportunities. This summer, our leadership team unveiled what we hope will be another resource for Minnesota leaders on their journey – Community Leader Online.

Community Leader Online contains many of the features found in the print edition – the same articles, the same toolbox and the same resources. But, in addition, it provides interactive components - a quarterly survey, a place for you to post your thoughts and reflections on community leadership topics and space for you to share your leadership experiences with others.

We hope you will visit Community Leader Online at <http://www.communityleader.wordpress.com> if you have not done so already. Like all leadership endeavors, Community Leader Online will be most valuable as a resource if it is utilized by our full leadership team – our alumni across the state.

*Editor's Note: Alumni will be notified via e-mail when the content of Community Leader Online is updated. Those who are not receiving these e-mails should visit Community Leader Online to update their e-mail contact information.*

# Leadership Toolbox: Life-Long Learning

This edition of Community Leader examines the importance of life-long learning and its role in effective community leadership. The following are five tips to help BCLP alums become more effective learners on their leadership journey:

## **No. 1 - Self-Identify as a Learner:**

Many leaders, who identify leadership as "getting things done," forget to leave room for reflection and inquiry processes. Know that a big part of leadership is learning, so build reflection time into your day and inquiry time into your projects or work with groups.

## **No. 2 - Examine Assumptions and Mental Models:**

The first questions of any new project or initiative should include:

- What do we already know?
- What assumptions do we hold that need to be questioned?
- What do we know that we need to learn?
- Where are our likely blind spots?

## **No. 3 - Motivation to Learn:**

Learning, like all things, is most effective when it taps our personal passions, values, or interests. Frame questions in ways that appeal to your natural areas of interest - areas in which exploration will provide both personal motivation and community benefit.

## **No. 4 - Productive Orientation to Learning:**

Generative learning puts the concept of failure in an entirely different light. When learning is on an ongoing basis, there is no failure as every action results in learning or the opportunity for learning.

## **No. 5 - Be Intentional:**

Effective learners, individually and at the community level, are intentional about their learning goals. Examine your vision for yourself, your current reality and the gap in between. What do you need to learn if you're committed to closing that gap? That is your learning agenda.

# Leadership Notes and News:



**Brian Carlson, 1986 BCLP alum, Grand Rapids,** has received several awards and recognitions during the past year.

In January 2007, he received the Meritorious Service Award from the Minnesota Association of County Fairs for 30 years of service to county fairs across Minnesota. He has assisted numerous fairs in the areas of grant writing, fundraising and

understanding the entertainment business.

In May, the Minnesota State High School League recognized him for 30 years of judging high school speech, debate, coaching one-act plays and officiating girls high school volleyball.

He was elected last November to a directorship on the North Dakota Association of Fairs Board of Directors and is presently a nominee for the Wisconsin Association of Fairs Board of Directors.

Since 1982, Brian has chaired the local Volunteers for the Handicapped Association and served as a county Americans with Disabilities Act advocate. He is also presently serving his last term as Chairman of the Grand Rapids Township Board.

**Betsy Jensen, International Falls,** was named International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce president in August.

Betsy has more than 18 years business experience including supervision, general management, sales and marketing. She previously worked as a supervisor in the specialized care division for the United Health Group.

Her community leadership participation includes the United Way, Falls Memorial Hospital Foundation, and the Blandin Community Investment Partnership. She served as chairman of the board of the Chamber of Commerce from 1998 to 2000.

*(Source: International Falls Daily Journal)*



**Shelley Robinson 1996 BCLP alum, Hibbing,** joined the Iron Range Resources Board in June as a citizen member. She was appointed to the board by Speaker of the House Margaret Kelliher.

Shelley currently works as the Executive Director of Range Center in Chisholm, an organization that provides services to individuals with disabilities. She and her husband reside in Hibbing and have one son.

She said of her appointment, "My work experience with economic and community development groups will create a stronger bond between the agency and grassroots efforts

across the Iron Range. I hope to act as an effective liaison among the many committees, boards and groups working toward the betterment of the region."

*(Source: Iron Range Resources, RangeView, Fall 2007)*



**Shelli Urness, 1998 BCLP alum, Nisswa,** was named the

new Foundation Director for Riverwood Foundation earlier this year. In this position, she is responsible for fund development through special projects, annual campaigns and planned giving as well as grant writing.

"I'm very thrilled to have Shelli come on board as Foundation Director," said Michael Hagen,

Riverwood CEO. "She brings the right skills at the right time to the Foundation and has the leadership skills to take its growth and development to a new level. Shelli comes highly recommended by all who know her and will be a great asset to Riverwood and the Foundation."

Prior to joining Riverwood, Shelli was employed by Bremer Bank in Brainerd as a Nonprofit Resource Specialist and has spent most of her career working in project management, marketing and public relations in both the private and nonprofit sectors.

## Fall Retreat Season is in Full Swing

The Blandin Community Leadership Program's fall 2007 retreat season is in full swing and we are serving four remarkable community cohorts from all across the state:

Albert Lea, Minnesota  
Winsted, Minnesota  
New Ulm, Minnesota

Reservation Community Leadership Program: Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Leech Lake, Lower Sioux, Mille Lacs, Prairie Island, Red Lake Shakopee, and Upper Sioux

The program's success is not just due to the hard work and dedication of the participants during the retreat, but also can be attributed to all the community leaders who worked hard to get them there. The Blandin Foundation Leadership Team extends a huge thank you to all who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in BCLP and to all of the community leaders who helped with the recruitment process to make the program possible.

The Blandin Community Leadership Program is currently recruiting participants from the following communities:

Duluth, Minnesota  
Grand Rapids Area (*special focus on Eastern Itasca County*)  
Pipestone County, Minnesota  
Clay County, Minnesota  
Fergus Falls, Minnesota

Connect with friends and family you may know in these areas and encourage them to fill out an application. Applications are available online at [www.blandinfoundation.org](http://www.blandinfoundation.org).

# Blandin Foundation Welcomes New Director of Leadership

Dr. Valerie Shangreaux has always gravitated toward thinking in terms of the “big picture.”

Big picture thinking – or looking at community as a whole - is part of what made the leadership director position with the Blandin Foundation so attractive.

“I like the Foundation’s strength-based approach to leadership and community,” she said. “It’s an approach that says, ‘Let’s look at people’s strengths and let’s look at what’s already working.’”

Tapping into the strengths of others is familiar territory for Valerie, who has worked as an educator, an advocate for others, and an architect of leadership alliances.

Before coming to Grand Rapids on Sept. 10 to take the helm of leadership programming with the Foundation, she spent the last 17 years working at Oklahoma State University. There, she first worked as an instructor in home economics with emphasis on family relations then more recently as program manager of the Oklahoma Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Her work at Oklahoma State underscored the importance of quality leadership development.

“What we (experts in the leadership field) know is that communities that are resilient or communities that are thriving do so because of their leadership,” said Valerie. “People residing within communities that are not resilient have more difficulty being resilient themselves.”

Her skill set and background will bring many strengths to the Foundation’s leadership programming.



## About Valerie Shangreaux:

**Education:** Valerie received a B.S. degree from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln in Home Economics. Her M.A. degree is from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln in Educational Psychology. Valerie’s Ph.D. in Educational Psychology was earned from Oklahoma State University.

**Work Experience:** Valerie most recently worked as the program manager for the Oklahoma Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. She worked with this program in various roles for a total of 13 years. Previously, she taught Home Economics in the area of Family Relations for seven years at Oklahoma State and spent 10 years directing Youth in Education programs at the Lincoln Nebraska Indian Center. In addition, Valerie worked as a consultant for the Heartland Center for Leadership Development.

**Family:** Valerie has been married for 25 years to Jose Sanchez. They have a combined family of seven children and two grandchildren. The couple’s youngest son, Cedre, 14, made the move with his parents to Grand Rapids. The couple’s other children are grown.

**Exciting Prospects of the New Job:** Valerie is looking forward to going through the core leadership program with a Grand Rapids/Itasca County cohort next February. She also is excited about learning the culture of the Blandin Foundation and becoming a participating member of the Grand Rapids area community.

“We conducted a national search and interviewed numerous candidates for the leadership director position,” said Blandin Foundation President Jim Hoolihan. “We were most impressed with Valerie’s professionalism, her experience in the leadership field and her understanding of rural issues. All the qualities we were searching for came together in Valerie.”

Valerie has unique perspective in diversity in leadership, both through her work with minorities and on a personal level. She was born and raised in Pine Ridge, SD on the Oglala Sioux Indian Reservation.

“Diversity is vital to leadership,” she said. “Leadership must be diverse and leaders must work with diverse populations within the community.”

While she brings much to the Foundation and its work in leadership, she hopes to leave something as well – something that can only be achieved with others.

“I hope to help take us from good to great, but it’s a team effort,” she said. “For me, it’s about coming in and being a part of a team that takes us from good to great. When I leave, I hope that people don’t say, ‘There goes a great leader,’ but rather, ‘There goes a great team player.’”

*Valerie will be conversing with alums online over the next few months. To connect with Valerie online visit <http://www.communityleader.wordpress.com>.*

## Jim Krile Retires

After more than 20 years of service to the Blandin Foundation and rural Minnesota, Jim Krile is retiring. The Foundation is grateful for his work in and commitment to developing and sustaining healthy communities. Jim will be sharing his reflections on the past, present and future challenges and opportunities of community leadership in the next edition of *Community Leader*.



# The Team Players

The Blandin Foundation Leadership Staff works year-round helping others build healthy community. In this edition of Community Leader, members of the leadership team answer a few questions about what they do and why they chose leadership as a career.



## Becky Adams

**Education** - I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration.

**Role on the leadership team** - I work in recruitment and leadership programs including: Advanced Academy, Partners in Leadership, Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program and Blandin Community Leadership Program.

**I was attracted to leadership as a career choice because** - I was lucky enough to be hired at the Foundation as a temporary employee in 2004. Little did I know that my time at the Foundation would expand into a full-time job. I am excited to continue learning more about community leadership and truly see it as a "career choice."

**What is (are) the most gratifying aspect(s) of your job?** - I love getting to know our alumni and community members throughout rural Minnesota. They are hard working, dedicated people - each a gift to their community. I also truly love the team I work with - they make coming to work so rewarding.

**Personal information** - I live with my family in Grand Rapids. Most of our "free" time is spent attending activities - I love it. Of course it is football season - my favorite time of year.



## Malissa Bahr

**Education** - I have a B.S. degree in Law Enforcement, a B.S. in Business Law, a B.S. in Political Science and an M.A. degree in Organizational/Industrial Psychology.

**Role on the leadership team** - My responsibilities in leadership include: managing all leadership program recruitment efforts; and managing leadership support staff.

**I was attracted to leadership as a career choice because** - I think the most interesting piece about the community leadership program is working with hard-working individuals across the state that are passionate about the communities they live in. The main goal of every participant and community who takes part in any of our leadership programs is making their community a healthier place for not just themselves, but future generations.

**What is (are) the most gratifying aspect(s) of your job?** - The most gratifying aspect of my job is hearing back from alumni about what they have been doing, and what their community has been doing since the program. It truly is a way in which you can connect with the long-term impact of our work.

**Personal information** - My husband, Rob and I spend a lot of time with our two children, Griffin who is 4 and Barrie who is 1.



## John Weyer

**Education** - I graduated from Hill City High School then went on to earn an Associate of Arts degree from Itasca Community College. My bachelor's degree in Marketing came from St. Cloud State University.

**Role on the leadership team** - I coordinate, maintain and provide advanced technical work related to the leadership database, web site, Blandin Knowledge Network site, video editing, social software and e-blasts.

**I was attracted to leadership as a career choice because** - Community Leadership works toward a common goal and building healthy communities. To be a part of that is a privilege.

**What is (are) the most gratifying aspect(s) of your job?** My job is constantly changing, challenging and when I lay down at night I feel good about what I have done.

**Personal information** - I am single with no children. I enjoy hunting and spending time with family.



## Trisha Zimmerman:

**Education** - I graduated from Bemidji State University in December of 2000 with a B.S. degree in Business Administration with an emphasis in Management and a minor in Information Systems.

**Role on the leadership team** - I am a program assistant for leadership programs. My primary focus programs are the Blandin Community Leadership Program, Community Partners-in-Leadership and Innovation Center. I also work as the director's assistant.

**I was attracted to leadership as a career choice because** - I love the work I do and all the details that go into it.

**What is (are) the most gratifying aspect(s) of your job?** - When you talk to the participants and they are so happy and excited to go through the program.

**Personal information** - My husband and I are high school sweethearts. We have been together for 13 years, married for 7. We have a wonderful 3-year-old daughter that is the light of our lives.

# Framing: A Community Example

**Framing defined:** Framing is one of the three core competencies of leadership. Framing involves defining community opportunities and issues in ways that lead to effective action. Through framing, a group understands and decides: 1) what needs to be done, 2) how it is to be done and 3) why it is important to do. – from *The Community Leadership Handbook* by James F. Krile, Gordon Curphy and Duane R. Lund



## Changing the mindset on poverty – Circles of Support

Alice Miller, 2000 BCLP alum, Grand Rapids, knows poverty. She knows that it is not a state of being that people actively choose, that it is not the result of laziness and that poverty can be about more than money.

Alice's challenge as a community leader for the last four years has been to help foster an understanding of the culture of poverty in other community leaders.

Her vehicle for community understanding of poverty issues has been Circles of Support, a grassroots, volunteer organization that partners families in poverty with three allies who are not. Alice currently works as the lead coordinator for the program.

Circles of Support began conceptually in the Grand Rapids/Itasca County area in 2003, with official meetings starting in 2004. The program now reaches residents of Koochiching County as well.

The allies, said Alice, are often established community leaders who come from the middle or even upper class and often bring to the program a preconceived notion about poverty.

For some middle-aged allies, those preconceived notions were developed in childhood or by the media. But, the faces of poverty have changed.

“The poverty ideas of allies (when they come into the program) isn't what we're dealing with today,” said Alice.

Poverty in small town Minnesota is no longer an isolated “bum who lives under the bridge,” but often includes young families with multiple below-living-wage jobs who barely get by. And, it is certainly not an isolated problem. In Itasca County, nearly a quarter of the population lives below the federally defined low-income line.

Because of the preconceived notions that many begin with as an ally, these community leaders often think they can solve the problem with money – i.e. if one

just works harder and attains a better education, they too, can have the American Dream.

Alice, however, knows that it isn't that simple. Domestic violence, drug or alcohol addiction issues in the family setting and unstable family backgrounds as well as numerous other factors can perpetuate a culture of poverty – a world where middle class values simply do not hold true. It is a world where everyday is a struggle to survive and one where family members may not even view a lack of money as the most pressing issue.

While Mary Ives, 1992 BCLP alum, Grand Rapids, said she came into the program knowing about the culture of poverty through other work, she reported gaining valuable knowledge.



*Circles of Support has enlisted the help of about 56 allies since meetings began in 2004. Miller is pictured seated on the floor at right. Ives is pictured in the first full row, at left.*

“I learned that people make bad choices because they don't have as many opportunities to mentor good choices,” said Mary. “The background for making good choices is not available to people in poverty ... We have trouble realizing, as allies, that sometimes it's one step forward and two steps back.”

It is when allies come a little closer to the pain of the culture of poverty and gain a better frame of the issue that they can befriend a participant and then start to make a difference in the lives of a family in poverty.

“Basically Circles of Support works the way it works in life,” said Alice. “It's about being a friend ... It's about knowing somebody, having somebody who will put in a good word for you on a job application or finding out about a job through an ally before it becomes available. Participants have more knowledge to tap into than they had on their own.”

Do you have a suggestion for a feature story on framing, building social capital or mobilizing resources from your own community? Let us know about it, email: [mjbahr@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:mjbahr@blandinfoundation.org).

# Leader as Learner *Continued*

technical challenges – those for which we have the necessary know-how and procedures – and adaptive challenges – those for which our existing knowledge or approaches are inadequate. Adaptive change, then, requires new learning that includes changing attitudes, values, and behaviors, as well as a willingness to experiment and learn from both successes and failures.

## Two Learning Skills: Reflection and Inquiry

Most of us would agree that the most powerful learning comes from direct experience. But there is a catch. A wealth of experiences that were not reflected upon in meaningful ways will yield very little learning.

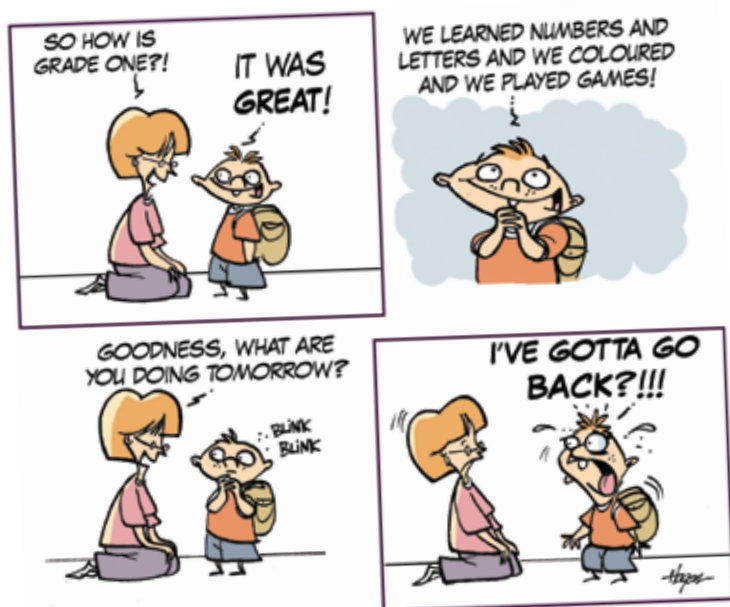
Intentional reflection is a powerful learning tool for leaders that involves actively making sense of new experiences, rather than simply accepting or rejecting them based how well they fit current thinking. Reflection skills require slowing down - becoming more aware of how we form our mental models and the ways they influence our actions.

Inquiry is another important skill that comes into play once we realize that our assumptions, behavioral norms, or mental models deserve questioning. Inquiry involves things like:

- Asking questions
- Making your own reasoning explicit
- Encouraging others to question your view (and the views of others)
- Designing experiments that will provide new information

Finally, remember that learning is never over because our creative drive as individuals and communities is ever present. When we meet our vision or goals, new vision or goals will arise. We are on a perpetual learning curve as individuals and communities, so let's enjoy the ride!

Leaders help their communities learn their way into the future!



**Note:** Tips on things to do to improve learning skills in ways that contribute to community leadership can be found in this edition's Leadership Toolbox on page 2.

## Want to Know More?

For further information on this topic, the Community Leader team recommends the following:

### Books

*Teaching Smart People How to Learn* by Chris Argyris. Harvard Business Review, May 1, 1991.

*On Organizational Learning*, by Chris Argyris. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993.

*Leadership Without Easy Answers* by Ronald A. Heifetz, Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1994.

*The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organization*, by Peter M. Senge, Doubleday Publishing, 2006.

*Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society*, by Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers. Doubleday Publishing, 2005.

### Articles

"Chris Argyris: Theories of Action, Double-Loop Learning and Organization Leadership" is available online at: <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/argyris.htm>.

"Peter Senge and the Theory and Practice of the Learning Organization" is available online at: <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/senge.htm>

"Shared Leadership" is available online at: [http://www.infed.org/leadership/shared\\_leadership.htm](http://www.infed.org/leadership/shared_leadership.htm)

### Websites

<http://www.solonline.org/> The Society for Organizational Learning is a learning community comprised of organizations, individuals, and local Society for Learning communities. The organization was formed in April of 1997 to continue the work of MIT's Center for Organizational Learning (1991-1997).

# Community Leader

Blandin Community Leadership Programs Newsletter



BLANDIN FOUNDATION™

Blandin Foundation  
100 N. Pokegama Avenue  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Address Service Requested

NonProfit ORG  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Duluth, MN  
PERMIT No. 1003

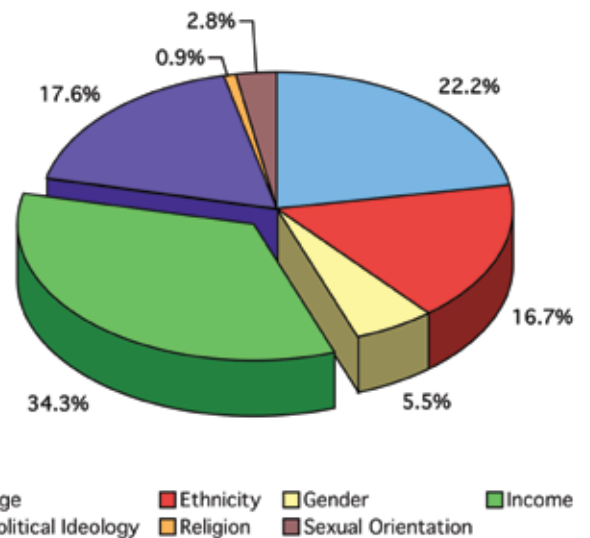
## CPIL to be piloted in October

In our summer edition of the Community Leader Online, we asked you to tell us “What differences make a difference in your community?” A significant number of you responded that the largest concern was economic differences (see chart), which create barriers to building and sustaining a healthy community.

Communities both large and small are faced with the challenges created from economic differences. In 2006, the leadership team began working with the Grand Rapids area to develop a leadership program that builds leadership capacity to increase access to goods, services and opportunities to those in poverty. The program is titled “Community Partners in Leadership.” CPIL is designed to enhance the following:

- Increase the ability of participants to access networks across economic status.
- Deepen participant understanding of the challenges and opportunities present to those of differing economic status.
- Be able to organize a focused community effort to increase access to goods and services for those in poverty.

**What difference makes the most difference in your community?**



CPIL will be piloted in October 2007, in partnership with the Grand Rapids community. CPIL opens up a new leadership opportunity for all of our alumni communities. We are currently looking for communities that may be interested in taking part in the CPIL program for 2008. If you think your community could benefit from building leadership capacity around the issue of economic difference, please call Malissa Bahr at 877-882-2257 or [mjbahr@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:mjbahr@blandinfoundation.org).