Introduction

> *If you want to go fast, go alone.*
> *If you want to go far, go together.*
>
> — African Proverb

This book is written for those who care about enhancing the health and vitality of their community. If building healthy and thriving communities is something you are passionate about, actively involved in, or aspire to pursue, my hope is that you will use this book as a do-it-yourself guide. It focuses on building a healthier society that engages and involves all its members. The stories and case studies it presents illustrate the many ways that community members, as well as elected and appointed leaders, have engaged in actions and practiced leadership that made a real difference in their communities.

The contributors to this book believe that strong local communities are the foundation, the tap roots, of a healthy, participatory, and resilient society. In this age of ever-changing technology, mega-corporations, and economic globalization, livelihoods are at risk, natural resources are being depleted, and climate change is damaging the very planet upon which we all depend. National leaders and global corporations are failing to address this growing crisis. However, throughout the US, and in many other nations, local communities are finding innovative

ways to thrive while protecting natural resources, enhancing the livelihood of their community members, and growing social vitality. Perhaps rather than looking to national governments, corporations, or new technologies to solve our environmental and social problems, we should learn from successful communities in order to find paths to a more sustainable future. These communities include not just local governments but also groups of individuals that are working together for the common good, such as neighborhood associations, schools, local and Indigenous groups, faith communities, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

I have found that this often challenging yet rewarding work is somewhat like building or renovating a house. Many of the guiding leadership principles we will discuss are critical for establishing or reinforcing the existing foundation of a community. Without a strong *foundation*, future gains can easily collapse. The principles shared here also address ways to improve the *plumbing and wiring systems* of a community, including free-flowing energy and communication, information sharing and dissemination, and numerous feedback loops. You know what happens in a house when the sewer pipe is blocked! No community (or house) can stand without a viable *structure*, which is strong, but also resilient enough to be modified when necessary to meet the needs of the future. Houses (and communities) most importantly provide *shelter* for all within—shelter that can weather difficult times. And, finally, a thriving community is a *home*; a home where there is trust, collaboration, social justice, and where conflicts or disagreements are resolved amiably.

This book will share our research and reflections on each of the *12 Guiding Principles*. It includes explanations and short examples—illustrations of each principle along with 25 *Case Studies* from around the world from knowledgeable contributing authors/practitioners, and *Notes from the Field*, which list practical do's and don'ts. No, we cannot give you all of the answers to the questions you will have but we hope that this book will provide you with tools and resources for practical,

effective leadership and collaboration that can guide you in your own important work of helping to build a community that people can truly call home.

A Journey of Discovery

As the primary author of this book, I hope that sharing some of my personal journey may help you to understand how I came to realize how local communities can thrive and make a transformative difference in the lives of their members.

Local Challenges and Failures
of "Expert" or "Top-Down" Approaches

The toxic leachate from the landfill, located in a wetland, was seeping into the ocean off southern Massachusetts. Swimmers on a nearby town beach were getting ill with "swimmers' itch." Sewage from the basements of homes was flowing (by illegal connections) into stormwater manholes and nearby streams. One dark, stormy, rainy night, as the town engineer, I got a call at 2:00 a.m. from a resident who yelled into the phone: "Your water is flowing through the first floor of my house!" I soon discovered that their house had been built on a lot created by digging into an abutting wetland. It was raining and the water from the wetland was flowing through the lower floor of their home. As a young town engineer working for this coastal New England community, I tried to draw upon my engineering training. I concluded that many of these technical community problems could be solved, at least in part, by engineering, new ordinances, and town policies using a simple top-down expert approach. Many of these environmental problems were, indeed, *partially* solved or reduced through these technical fixes. Yet there were systemic issues, linked to community values and norms, that had allowed this plethora of adverse health and environmental conditions to be created. Sometimes it felt like I was playing a game of whack-a-mole, because every time something was fixed another problem would pop up. My central question was: Can I help this

community vision and plan for ways to enhance their own health and vitality rather than just reacting to poorly thought-through actions? This was not part of my engineering training. I was ill prepared to help this community understand its challenges, assess opportunities for a different path, and then engage residents in actions that they recognized were needed to enhance their quality of life.

This expert-driven approach to solving local community problems and planning for the future, which I had been taught and had often observed, has historic roots. It was the foundation of the United States' urban renewal efforts (and also similar efforts in Central and Eastern Europe and other parts of the world) during the 60s and early 70s. During this period of urban renewal, federal funding and expert local planners supported tearing down historic downtown buildings and struggling neighborhoods and replacing them with large low-income housing units, space for strip malls, and parking garages. It was reported that by 1965 nearly 800 cities, in every state, were participating in urban renewal. This resulted in tearing down housing units with mass displacement of families, such as in New Haven, Connecticut, where 30,000 people were forced to find new homes.[1] Historic downtowns were completely leveled and replaced with nondescript buildings and parking garages. Poor or disempowered minority populations were frequently impacted the most. The experts did not seek or allow the input or involvement of citizens. This "renewal" effort resulted in entire zones of poverty where the sense of community had all but evaporated, crime flourished, and people felt trapped in a downward spiral of hopelessness.

Recognizing that the expert-driven, top-down model for improving the quality of local communities has not only failed to deliver, but sometimes actually caused more harm than good, was a valuable lesson for me in rethinking my approach. Five years later, I was ready to learn and explore new ways of leading that truly engaged community members and supported needed change. I soon discovered this required giving up some control. I could no longer be the expert in the room.

Adaptive Leadership and How This Can Be Applied to Leading Change

Helping people face *their* challenges, *their* "problematic reality," and then supporting *them* when *they* undertake work that *they* realize needs to be done is the focus of Adaptive Leadership. This type of leadership work does not sound like rocket science but I have found it is challenging to practice. It requires giving up control and no longer functioning like an expert, but instead serving as a resource and a support system and then trusting the path (or paths) the community decides to take. These principles of Adaptive Leadership are described by Ron Heifetz[2] in his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers* and in other later publications.[3] In the 1980s, I was fortunate to take his course on leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government (HKS). This course transformed my approach to working with local communities and its lessons are embedded in the concepts and applied approaches described in this book. Upon graduation, I entered the realm of town management in Vermont and New Hampshire, frequently seeking to build local community empowerment through an Adaptive Leadership approach to doing my job. Local community leadership is not easy: resources are limited but needs are not, special interest groups try to set self-serving agendas, and change is difficult and sometimes scary for residents. I found that listening, really listening, was essential in this new paradigm. I also found that the more direct involvement people had in the change, the more likely it was to succeed. The wise African proverb that says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together," captures what I discovered after ten years of working with local communities.

Over and over again, I have witnessed the reality that practicing this kind of leadership can build the capacity for citizen-driven change that would not have been possible with an expert-driven approach. Later, I share the example[4] of how the town of Hartford, Vermont, working with its four neighboring towns was able to close two old seeping landfills and build a model community recycling center. This change from

a landfill to the "un-shopping center" was led by nearly a thousand volunteers from ages 8 through 80. This incredible three years of work led by the local citizens, and eventually supported by the local government officials, was nationally recognized and given an award presented by Hillary Clinton as well as recorded in the US Congressional Record.

Building Community Capital
and Providing Support to a Wide Variety of
Communities at Home and Abroad

After deciding to move on and apply what citizens, dedicated local officials, and affiliated non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had taught me during my time in managing local governments, a colleague, Delia Clark, and I partnered with Antioch University New England (AUNE) to form Antioch New England Institute (ANEI). The Institute's goal was to support the sustainability of local communities and schools across the US and, eventually, in other countries as well. Its mission was to promote a vibrant and sustainable environment, economy, and society by encouraging informed civic engagement. To achieve this mission, we focused on building community capacity or community capital—the term community capital represents different forms of capital in a local community. These are described and discussed in Chapter 1.

My colleagues and I were fortunate to be able to recruit graduate students and faculty members from the university and to work with many active and dedicated partners to undertake work in the USA and ten other countries. A number of stories and case studies in this book are based upon ANEI experiences. Its local community capacity-building efforts ranged from working with US schools on community-based environmental education programs and training local elected town councils, to assisting in building the civil sector capacity of the three Baltic countries through the development of local community foundations. Each of these efforts embraced developing broad and deep partnerships, working directly with local residents, and practic-

ing many of the Guiding Principles that serve as the foundation for this book.

Identifying Guiding Principles for Effective Leadership Approaches for Helping Communities Thrive: An International Research Study

As I consulted with groups that varied from local neighborhood associations to the Bulgarian Ministry of the Environment, I found that while specific issues varied widely, an adaptive management approach and certain community change processes seemed helpful in most situations. I began to think that certain core principles may transcend social and cultural norms and boundaries. When I decided on a research focus for my doctoral work, I set out to see what could be learned by studying communities that were successfully thriving despite often difficult and challenging circumstances.

This research was inspired and envisioned years earlier during my participation in the World Bank Foundation's 1998 international invitational workshop led by the late Elinor Ostrom (Nobel Laureate in economics) in Washington DC on the theme of community-based natural resource management. The workshop was designed to provide a platform upon which to share and learn from effective community-based programs from around the world that supported the local economy and conserved or improved local ecological conditions. Later, I was able to draw upon the hundreds of submitted cases from this workshop and other effective local initiatives to identify common approaches and factors that led to successful outcomes.

This book was written in order to share what was discovered from this workshop and my follow-up international research efforts. Eventually 12 categories evolved from all of this research data, which are here referred to as the *12 Guiding Principles*. These Guiding Principles are a compilation of what many local community leaders, from five continents, have found to be essential for growing healthy communities. These findings[5] have since been published in peer-reviewed papers,

taught in graduate classes, used by local governmental officials, and applied to assisting local communities in the USA, Eastern Europe, and South America.

I hope this book will provide you with the practical leadership and practitioner tools that are needed on your journey of supporting the health and vitality of your local community. Today, more than ever before, this timely and critical work is needed to help find paths to a more sustainable future.

Challenges of Our Communities

Growing Local Leadership

> *Our true destiny…is a world built from the bottom up*
> *by competent citizens living in solid communities,*
> *engaged in and by their places.*
>
> — DAVID W. ORR

Local Communities: The Foundation of Society

How can local communities thrive or become more successful?[1] I believe that any useful approach should include: 1) growing social vitality, empowerment, justice, equity, and trust within the community; 2) enhancing the livelihood of community members; and 3) improving local environmental and ecological conditions. In this book, there are 25 case studies as well as 19 brief examples of communities that are moving from surviving to thriving. These stories of diverse communities are located in 17 counties and 11 states in the USA. For example, the case study from Baltimore, Maryland, shares how an inner-city neighborhood with thousands of vacant and abandoned homes was able to reclaim wood and bricks through deconstruction while also reducing unemployment and helping to revitalize blighted neighborhoods. In Saskatchewan, Canada, locally initiated community-based gardens helped immigrants address food insecurity and built community connections. The case study from Hiware Bazar, India, illustrates

Credit: James Gruber

Figure 1.1. A university community of international students, faculty, and families.

how a village was transformed from a drought-prone and water-scarce impoverished settlement into an economically, environmentally, and socially strong community. These and many other inspiring stories of communities moving from struggling towards thriving, are told by knowledgeable contributing authors throughout the book.

I have found that there are many books, publications, and websites about improving local communities that give expert advice on *what* needs to be done, but pay far less attention to *how* this can be accomplished in a way that builds the strength of the community and a strong democracy. Today, many people in the United States seem to have lost faith in the value of our democratic traditions and citizen-empowered change, and instead favor a top-down, expert-driven, more "efficient" approach, frequently stating that we need to "run local communities like a business." It appears that this mindset has also become more common in other countries around the world. Frequently, these citizens do not see that they have an essential role to play in the leadership of their community. In my many years of experience in local government in the US, international consulting, and now as a researcher/professor, I have not found this top-down/expert-driven approach to

be successful in helping communities thrive. In fact, I have found the opposite to be true.

This book emphasizes *how* local elected, appointed, and volunteer leaders can help their communities thrive. It provides specific guidance based upon the 12 Guiding Principles, and offers specific tools on how to apply the requisite leadership and collaboration skills.

Challenges That Local Communities Are Facing

Today, local communities are facing many of the same challenges that state and national governments are facing (or, sometimes, avoiding). This includes the climate crisis, which is impacting our food systems and creating serious health risks for seniors and the vulnerable, through record summer temperatures, droughts, severe storms, and other climate impacts. Many jobs have been lost or are now unstable due to technological changes and globalization shifting manufacturing to other parts of the world. Local communities are also struggling to help refugees, impoverished and at-risk families, and the homeless. And the litany goes on and on.

There are real stresses in meeting the critical needs of a local community with limited financial resources. I remember how this stress was palpable for our town's staff and elected leaders. At the same time, volunteerism was decreasing and we were forced to pay for help that had previously been done by volunteers. Research by Robert Putnam[2] and others have described many factors contributing to citizens' decreasing involvement.

What to do? Where to turn? How can a local community, particularly one without wealthy members and adequate resources, turn itself around when it is struggling not just economically, but also environmentally and socially? Local community leaders face these concerns every day. These unsung heroes, who jump into critically needed local community leadership roles, have rarely received formal training in public and nonprofit administration, fund raising, or leadership. My hope is that the Guiding Principles and illustrative case studies in this book will provide a resource for you and other dedicated and brave individuals.

Community Capital: What It Is and Why It Matters

I will start with explaining the term *community capital* and how this concept will help you more effectively approach and enhance your community building efforts.

Communities have different forms of community capital (also referred to as community capacity and community wealth). This concept of capital can be illustrated by a manufacturing plant. The investment in building a manufacturing plant (referred to as *built capital*) along with the ongoing inputs of materials, labor, and energy, results in a flow
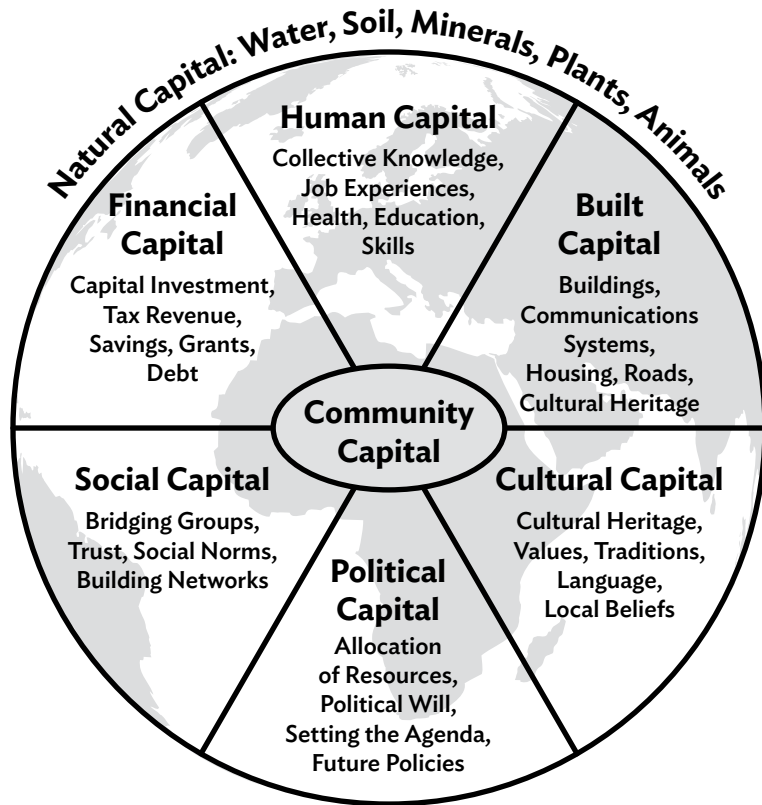
Figure 1.2. Graphical representation of the Seven Forms of Community Capital.

Natural Capital: Water, Soil, Minerals, Plants, Animals

Human Capital
Collective Knowledge, Job Experiences, Health, Education, Skills

Financial Capital
Capital Investment, Tax Revenue, Savings, Grants, Debt

Built Capital
Buildings, Communications Systems, Housing, Roads, Cultural Heritage

Community Capital

Social Capital
Bridging Groups, Trust, Social Norms, Building Networks

Political Capital
Allocation of Resources, Political Will, Setting the Agenda, Future Policies

Cultural Capital
Cultural Heritage, Values, Traditions, Language, Local Beliefs

of manufactured products or goods. Other forms of community capital provide different types of flows or outputs. For example, a healthy forest is a form of *natural capital* that can provide a flow of lumber, oxygen, purification of water, and other ecological products and services. Preserving and enhancing different types of a community's capital is essential in building and maintaining a healthy community.

Community practitioners and researchers have organized these different forms of community capital into three to eight categories. I will use seven categories that I have personally found easiest to work with and most helpful for communicating with others. These types of community capital are well documented by a number of authors.[3] Figure 1.2 is a graphic representation of these. Growing community capital will help your community move towards having "healthy ecosystems; vibrant regional economies; and social equity and empowerment."[4]

Each of these seven forms of community capital are shown above with a working definition and brief comment based upon a wide range of ideas from other researchers and authors.[5] It is important to emphasize the importance of investing time, energy, and resources to grow each of these forms of community capital. The Guiding Principles will provide ideas on *how* you can approach this challenge through reaching out to and collaborating with the members of your community.

The Guiding Principles:
How They Were Identified and How They Can Be Helpful

The 12 Guiding Principles (shown in Figure 1.3) include successful approaches and strategies for communication and facilitation, conflict resolution, negotiation, managing and facilitating multiparty stakeholder processes, adaptive management, managing complexity, participatory decision making, building local community capital, and many other local community leadership and management skills. In general, my research has documented that many of these principles transcend a wide range of local cultures and economies and appear to be transcultural in their application.
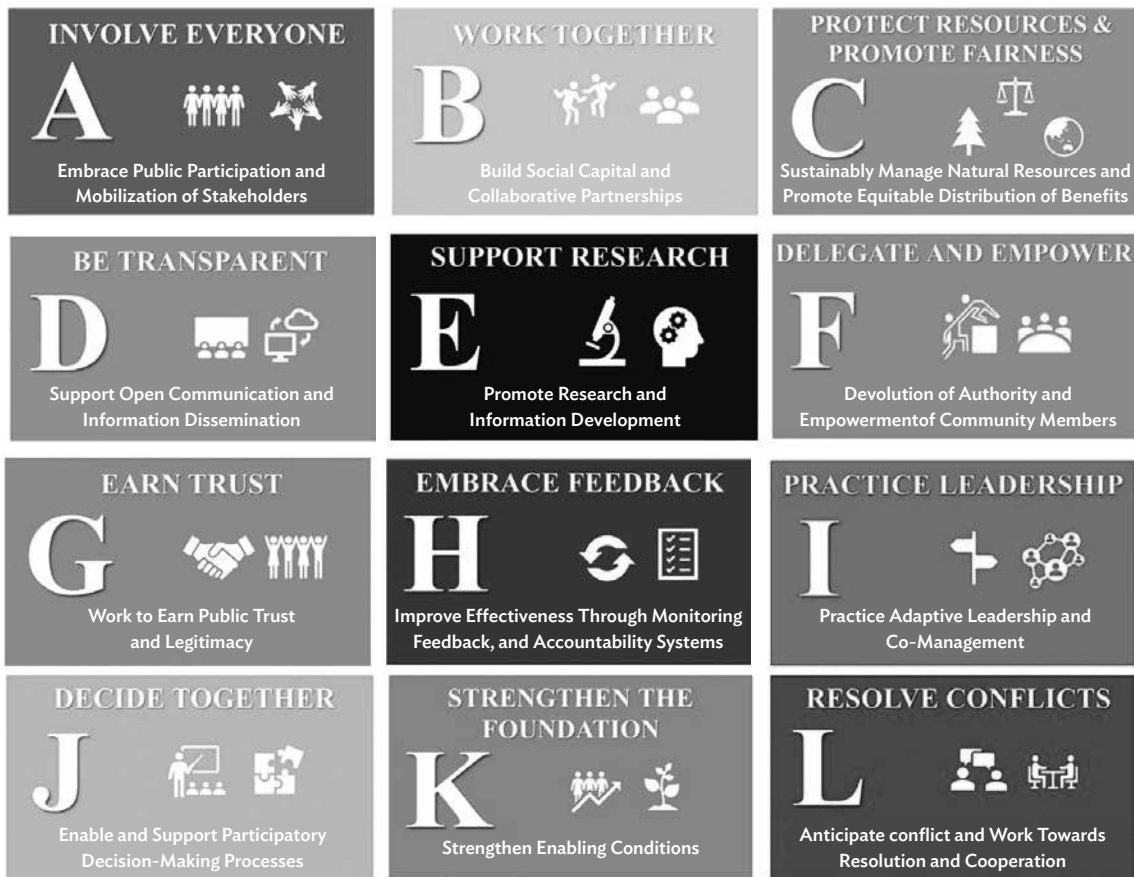
Forms of Community Capital

- **Natural Capital: Renewable and nonrenewable natural ecological systems such as streams, forests, ground water, soil, and air.** Sustainably managing the natural resources and services provided from natural capital (including limiting the harvesting and use of them) is essential if you wish to maintain the source of natural capital and its ability to provide for the future. Other forms of capital (see below) can be considered embedded in and/or dependent upon the community's ecological or natural capital system. Drawing down or damaging the natural capital systems will impact the other forms of community capital.

- **Human Capital: The collective knowledge, education, skills, job experiences, health, self-esteem, and motivation of the community members.** Investments in these areas will grow a community's human capital.

- **Social Capital: The shared social norms, trust, and networks that impact how individuals and groups get along.** A form of positive social glue. High social capital requires the investment of time and energy. It includes networks of bonding and bridging between individuals and groups.

- **Political Capital: The ability of individuals and groups to influence the political agenda within the community.** This can include the ability to help set the agenda, future policies, and allocation of resources. High political capital of citizens is supported by participatory democracy and broad empowerment of all members of a community.

- **Cultural Capital: The local beliefs, values, traditions, language, history, and cultural heritage of a community.** Cultural capital can give community members their sense of identity and sense of place.

- **Financial Capital: A community's monetary assets invested in other forms of capital or financial instruments.** Forms of public financial capital can include savings, debt capital, investment capital, tax revenue, and grants. Private philanthropic capital can support community investments that yield public goods.

- **Built Capital: The built manufactured and infrastructure capital of a community such as water and wastewater systems, roads, machinery, electronic communication systems, buildings, and housing.** Under- or over-expanding built capital can adversely impact other forms of community capital.

How the Principles Were Identified

There was no magic wand or grand vision that developed these principles. I had an opportunity to listen to and read what local practitioners, local community leaders, and researchers found to be common in many, if not most, communities that were healthy and thriving, or at least beginning to thrive. The initial data was available from a workshop facilitated by the late Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom.[6] Sorting through all this information, which included hundreds of case studies from the workshop, as well as academic research papers, and some site visits, and then organizing the findings into 12 categories, required

Figure 1.3. Twelve Guiding Principles for a Healthy Future.

INVOLVE EVERYONE
A
Embrace Public Participation and Mobilization of Stakeholders

WORK TOGETHER
B
Build Social Capital and Collaborative Partnerships

PROTECT RESOURCES & PROMOTE FAIRNESS
C
Sustainably Manage Natural Resources and Promote Equitable Distribution of Benefits

BE TRANSPARENT
D
Support Open Communication and Information Dissemination

SUPPORT RESEARCH
E
Promote Research and Information Development

DELEGATE AND EMPOWER
F
Devolution of Authority and Empowermentof Community Members

EARN TRUST
G
Work to Earn Public Trust and Legitimacy

EMBRACE FEEDBACK
H
Improve Effectiveness Through Monitoring Feedback, and Accountability Systems

PRACTICE LEADERSHIP
I
Practice Adaptive Leadership and Co-Management

DECIDE TOGETHER
J
Enable and Support Participatory Decision-Making Processes

STRENGTHEN THE FOUNDATION
K
Strengthen Enabling Conditions

RESOLVE CONFLICTS
L
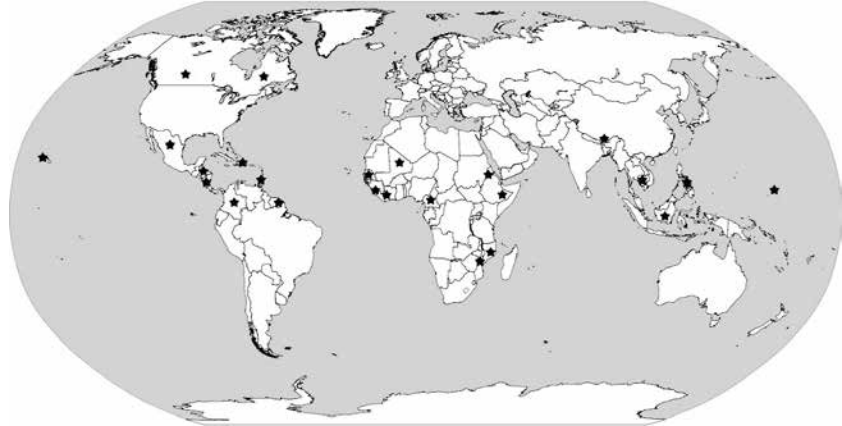Anticipate conflict and Work Towards Resolution and Cooperation

Figure 1.4. Location of
initial research cases
that were foundational
for the Twelve Guiding
Principles.

several years of work. Figure 1.4 shows the location of the initial 24 sites where local community data was analyzed. I see myself primarily as the messenger of this information, not the creator. The goal was to minimize any interpretation and overly broad statements, and to present, in an easily comprehensible form, what these community leaders and researcher were finding. The synthesis of the data forming the 12 principles is explained in each one of the core chapters. Two research papers that provide more technical background information are also available.[7]

How This Book Is Organized

This book includes 14 chapters. The following 12 chapters (2 through 13) each cover one Guiding Principle. Each chapter starts with a brief *Review of Guiding Principle*. This is followed by the *Research Corner* that provides five characteristics of the principle plus related research. I then offer one or two brief examples or stories to further illustrate the principle. Two *Case Studies* and shorter *Case-in-Points* are provided. Each chapter ends with *Notes from the Field*, which provide practical *Do's* and *Don'ts* in a list of suggestions or best practices.

The 25 case studies come from a wide range of communities that are beginning to thrive, and include those from regions with local economies considered developing, transitional, or developed, in the US and
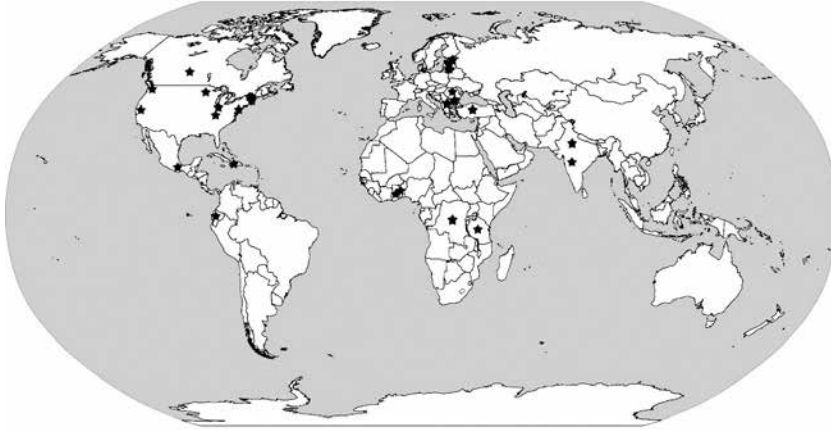
Figure 1.5. Location of the 44 sites of case studies and brief examples in the book.

other parts of the world. Each case study primarily illustrates the guiding principle discussed in the chapter. Also, other principles are noted where relevant. These case studies, from knowledgeable contributing authors, share specific and effective approaches on how a community can move from struggling towards thriving.

The last chapter, Chapter 14, provides a *Toolbox of Leadership Strategies*. This includes a *Collaborative Planning Approach* model for local convening, visioning, priority setting, planning, and implementation processes. I provide specific leadership tools and techniques for how to work effectively, step by step, with community groups. These approaches are based upon successful initiatives in the US and internationally. I end the book with a few concluding thoughts in the final section *The Way Forward*. Comprehensive End Notes for each chapter and an Index are provided in the back of the book.