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An Analysis of Success in Rural Economic Development: The Case of Daviess County, Kentucky

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AN ANALYSIS OF SUCCESS IN RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF
DAVIESS COUNTY, KENTUCKY

by

Timothy W. Roy

A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Over the last half-century, numerous factors have resulted in a significant economic downturn in American manufacturing, with particularly negative impacts on rural regions throughout the country. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine one rural Kentucky community's attempts to bolster its industrial relevance, as well as the region's overall economy, by employing an economic development strategy known as Kentucky's Work Ready Communities (WRC). This initiative, introduced by the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board in 2012, aims to attract new or expanding industry to communities or regions by demonstrating a strong infrastructure and a sustainable workforce that is prepared to meet the needs of industry. Daviess County, located in northwestern Kentucky, was the first Kentucky community to earn the certification. This study chronicles one community's success in earning the certification, while also aiming to identify specific economic impacts related to the certification and how this economic development program has impacted workforce development strategies and collaboration within the Daviess County community. Interviews with key stakeholders who were actively involved in the community strategy were conducted to gather perception data related to economic improvements that have resulted from achievement of the certification and to determine if workforce development strategies have improved as a result of the WRC certification initiative. The results of the study yielded positive findings for both research questions posed. Further, the results of this case serve to inform other rural communities that may look to replicate success in strengthening the local economy by espousing a similar economic strategy.

Key words: Economic Development, Workforce Development, Educational Attainment, Soft Skills, National Career Readiness Certificate

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Context

According to a study conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (2016), “85 percent of our country’s persistent poverty counties can be found in rural areas of America. More than one-third of rural Americans live in poverty” (section 1). The concern expressed by the USDA’s report indicates that children that grow up in families living in poverty are nearly “three times as likely as other children to have poor health, are more likely to finish two fewer years of school, and are more likely to earn half as much money in their adult lives” (section 1). Robinson, Lyson, and Christy (2002) draw similar conclusions in their study, which highlights the negative impacts of declining economic opportunities on rural communities, including population decline, increase of poverty, increase in health and wellness concerns, and growing social impacts. In a related study, Zekeri (2013) provides additional insight into the interplay between the declining rural economy, negative social impacts, and the mass exodus of industry to larger cities or foreign countries. As a result of conditions outlined in these studies, the rural economy continues to struggle, and the cycle of poverty worsens.

Nationally, and particularly in rural locales of the country, many younger Americans find themselves without adequate employment opportunities with which to support themselves or their families (Zekeri, 2013). In addition, according to a study released by the United States Department of Agriculture in 2015, as tax rates and the rising cost of production and employee wages continue to escalate many rural regions find themselves in situations where industry is moving to other parts of the country, or even outside of the country, in an attempt to reduce cost

and increase production and profit (section 2). This only exacerbates the economic downturn in rural America.

Improving the economy by making an investment in America's rural communities and increasing opportunities is key to decreasing the poverty level and jumpstarting a sagging rural economy. As indicated in the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Development release, "Rural Economic Area Partnership Program" (2016), a number of states have developed workforce development programs in an attempt to reverse the trend and attract industry to rural areas. While many of these programs differ in constitution, most appear to center on developing key employability skills in children and the working age population of the community.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher focused on the economic development initiative that was launched in the state of Kentucky by the Workforce Innovation Board. This initiative, known as Kentucky Work Ready Communities, is open to any county in the state, since Kentucky is largely a rural locale; however, the aim is to support counties in rural areas of the state that desire to strengthen the workforce and attract industry to the area (Roenker, 2016). By earning the Work Ready Community certification, a county can communicate to industry that it has and will continue to develop a workforce that has the skills that are in the most demand by industry. The community on which this study focused earned the Work Ready Community certification by meeting threshold scores in the criteria areas of community commitment, educational attainment, high school graduation rate, percentage of homes with access to high-speed internet, soft skills development opportunities for working-age adults, and percentage of population holding a National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine one rural community in northwest Kentucky and its successful pursuit of the Kentucky Work Ready Communities certification. The particular community on which the study focused was the first community in the state to earn the certification, which is sponsored by the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board. The goal of the certification program is to attract new business and industry to a community or region by demonstrating a strong, highly skilled, and sustainable workforce that is prepared for the employment needs of today and in the future; thus, stimulating growth in the local economy.

By examining a rural community that has achieved the certification, and in sharing its story, the researcher and community leaders from across the state can become more formally informed when or if embarking upon pursuit of the Work Ready Communities certification, as well as the potential associated merits of the effort. As a result of the study, specific recommendations were formulated that strategically target success initiatives that may be unique for rural communities, given the difficulty of attracting industry to these areas. Finally, the study aimed to identify residual positive impacts of the community-led initiative with an assumption that such impacts exist.

Research questions

1. How has achieving the Work Ready certification positively impacted economic development in the community?
2. What are the perceptions among community stakeholders concerning workforce development approaches as a result of the Work Ready Communities initiative?

Scope and bounds

For the purposes of this study, the researcher examined the efforts of one Kentucky community and its attempt to strengthen its workforce development approach, as well as its efforts to stimulate and build its local economy and tax base by attracting new industry to the area. As previously noted, there are many challenges posed to rural communities in their efforts to remain viable and grow within a global economy. Because of these challenges, it is imperative for rural communities to continue to identify opportunities to strengthen the education level of the local populace, identify and strengthen key employability skills, focus budgeting plans to build an appropriate infrastructure to meet the needs of business and industry, and to develop a marketing plan to attract potential industry to the area.

By identifying and studying one rural Kentucky community that has earned the Work Ready Community certification, the researcher aimed to analyze its process for achieving the certification, as well as specific action steps that were taken by those in the community to demonstrate marked growth in priority areas of the certification criteria. Further, the research aimed to gauge the extent to which the certification has achieved its stated goal of attracting new business and industry to the area.

As a result of the research, an additional goal of the study was to determine if there are key practices within the effort that may prove substantive and sustainable in improving the quality of workforce development in the community, moving forward. This may include examining efforts within the local education system and work force, as well as targeted efforts to enhance collaboration and solidarity among all community stakeholders. While the nature of the qualitative case study may be challenging to replicate across scenarios, the researcher

endeavored to identify best practice efforts that could be recommended for other communities that may be working to identify similar economic development opportunities.

A sometimes-significant limitation to a qualitative study such as this one is the issue of self-reported data. While strong efforts were made to gather information and data from community stakeholders who were most closely involved in the Work Ready program within the selected community, the information provided by these individuals during the interview process must be taken at face value and may not be readily verifiable without further investigation. Therefore, while recommendations can be made by the researcher to other communities that wish to undertake this or any other economic development initiative, one must critically identify and examine the unique factors and conditions that are present in his or her own community before adopting a plan of action.

Because the nature of this study involved behaviors and findings from an individual community, causal inferences cannot be established with certainty and may not be completely transferrable. The results of this research serve to suggest best practices and other recommendations for communities that may also wish to pursue the Work Ready Community certification and realize a potential growth in workforce and economic development; however, further research would certainly be necessitated to verify any findings, as it applies from this to future studies.

Significance of the study

First and foremost, the following study examined one rural community's approach to strengthening its workforce for the purpose of economic development via the attraction of new industry. As a result of the research, one objective was to identify best practice approaches to

workforce and economic development for rural communities that can be shared with other rural communities searching for similar opportunities to expand their economic base. While a number of factors across communities will vary that influence success of such initiatives, the results of this particular study can inform community leaders of tactics that have proven to be successful or unsuccessful in other rural communities.

A secondary significance of such a study was to chronicle said community's efforts to attract new business and industry to the area and determine whether or not it met the Workforce Innovation Board's (WIB) stated goal for the Work Ready Communities program of drawing more locating or expanding interest from industry. In short, has the effort yielded the desired result: new business and industry settling in the area as a result of the community certification? A more important question for communities in search of workforce and economic development initiatives to ask may be, "Is this particular endeavor worth the effort?" Even if the overall goal of the program may or may not be met, the study intended to identify whether or not the individual initiatives of the larger movement have had a significant positive impact on the community.

Finally, the results of this case study may very well have identified some unintended benefits or consequences associated with the Work Ready Communities initiative in this particular community. By identifying such potential outcomes, one may gain further insight into developing a justification for implementation of a particular approach to economic development. With an understanding that numerous differences exist across communities, community leaders may take the results, including unintended benefits and consequences, into consideration when making a well-informed decision regarding the type of economic development initiative to implement in his or her rural community.

Key terms

1. Workforce development – Training programs and initiatives aimed at providing existing and future workers with the skills to complete tasks needed by employers, which allows organizations to remain competitive with existing markets (Holzer & Lerman, 1999).
2. Economic development – Efforts that seek to improve the economic wellbeing and quality of life for a community or region by creating or further developing jobs and supporting and improving a local tax base (www.svbic.com, 2018).
3. Educational attainment – Refers to the highest level of schooling that a person has reached. At the postsecondary level, the term refers to certificates or degrees obtained (census.gov, 2018).
4. Soft skills – Often referred to as “people skills,” the term describes personal attributes that indicate a high level of emotional intelligence and are broadly applicable across job titles and industries (Meeks, 2017).
5. National Career Readiness Certificate – A product of the ACT Corporation, the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) assesses an individual’s skill level in three areas deemed critical for employability: Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information. The NCRC was developed after researching over 16,000 occupations to identify key desired skills and is awarded at four levels: Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze (ncrc.ky.gov, 2018).

Summary

The following study focused on one rural Kentucky community and its effort to earn the Kentucky Work Ready Communities certification. The primary aim of the Work Ready Communities certification program, as designed by the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board,

is to improve both the workforce and economic development efforts of communities to communicate and exemplify a strong, highly-skilled workforce for industry and to attract additional industry and business to the local area. The end result of the program and related initiatives is economic stimulation and viability in a global economy.

Utilizing a qualitative research approach, and more specifically a case study, the researcher chronicled the community's process of working toward certification and becoming one of the state's very first communities to earn the Work Ready Communities certification. In doing so, best practices were identified, as well as intended and unintended benefits and consequences to the community. Ultimately, the study aimed to identify particular aspects of the process that were most impactful and whether or not the community has been able to meet its stated primary goal of attracting new industry to the area.

Through interaction with community leaders, associated stakeholders, and observations within the community, the researcher outlined specific recommendations that may prove helpful to other community leaders in search of economic development initiatives to bolster struggling economies. Ultimately, by sharing the process and results of one particular community that has experienced success in earning the Work Ready Communities certification, the study endeavored to assist others in determining whether or not such an initiative holds merit for their communities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

For the purposes of this research case study, the researcher examined one rural Kentucky community's approach to economic development and sustainability. By employing the ACT-developed Work Ready Communities initiative, the focus community of the study strengthened its workforce and developed its community to such an extent as to position itself to better attract new and expanding business and industry to the community and region. The study aimed to identify the journey and successes of the Work Ready Communities initiative in this particular case, as well as to determine whether or not the certification is finding success in stimulating economic growth in the community.

While the literature covers a wide variety of aspects related to the economic downturn of rural regions of the U.S., this review focused primarily on contributing factors to the decline of rural economy, various federal initiatives that have been introduced across the nation to help bolster rural economies, and a specific initiative that is somewhat new, yet finding some success in the states in which it has been implemented. The chapter concludes with an introduction to the community that is the subject of the case study.

While rural poverty is a growing concern across the United States, the research is important for identifying and measuring why an economic development initiative is successful and how it might be applied and adapted to other struggling communities that are looking for an opportunity to strengthen their workforce and economic viability. It is already widely known that the community that is the focus of this study has successfully earned the Work Ready Communities certification. The important lesson for communities that might be interested in initiating this program in their own community is determining whether achieving the certification actually equates to success in strengthening the economy.

The decline of the rural economy in America

Over the past several decades, there have been numerous studies that have chronicled the decline of the rural American economy (Albrecht, Albrecht, & Albrecht, 2000; Barkley & Hirschberger, 1992; Grant & Wallace, 1994; McGranahan, 1988). Most of these studies that have been examined provide significant detail and evidence suggesting specific trends and emerging data that highlight the economic divide between rural and urban areas that continues to widen (Albrecht, et al., 2000). Yet, for the purposes of this study, the identification and examination of the primary contributing factors to the economic decline in rural America is of primary concern to the researcher. It is through identification of the primary barriers that rural communities can begin to identify effective strategies to address them.

According to a 2005 study conducted by Gibbs, Kusmin, and Cromartie, close to 100% of the decline in jobs in rural areas is due to shifts from low skill to higher skill jobs in industry. As a result of this shift, existing industry simply has not been able to identify enough skilled workers to sustain the industry in the rural area. Thus, industry began moving out of the rural areas to more urbanized areas of the region or country. This shift, according to a study conducted by David Barkley (1995), is one of the primary contributors to the rural economic decline.

The shift from a goods-based industry, which includes vocations in agriculture, mining, and factory-based manufacturing, to a service-based industry with its emphasis on advanced technical skills that are the hallmark of modern industry has placed a tremendous strain on rural economies as the workforce struggles to keep up with the increasing demand for technical skills (Gibbs, et al., 2005). As previously mentioned, when industry is unable to identify a sufficient workforce with the necessary skills to fill positions, the industry has little choice but to relocate to an area that will allow it to effectively staff its positions.

As the skills-based shift gained momentum in the early-1990s, so too did the negative transition in available jobs in rural areas (Wojan, 2000). As of the early-2000s, agriculture, which used to dominate the American workforce in the previous centuries, epitomized the long-term decline in rural low-skill jobs and overall farm employment (Gibbs, et al., 2005). Because agriculture has dwindled to its current standing in the national economy, it has lost its ability to substantively impact large-scale patterns of change; so much so, that most of the remaining farmers in rural America are skilled owners and operators (Teixeira & Swaim, 1991). Likewise, according to Teixeira and Swaim (1991), rural manufacturing, which has an even higher concentration of low-skill positions than agriculture, has seen a dramatic decline over the past thirty years.

A 2000 study by Wojan amplifies this point by highlighting that “38% of the overall American workforce was employed in occupations requiring only low-level academic, technical, and reasoning skills” (p. 1). Wojan continues by emphasizing that 44% of jobs in rural America were those that can be considered low-skill occupations. This further illustrates the point that industry is continuing its shift away from rural America due to its skill requirements that the rural workforce is not currently capable of providing.

A second emerging factor from the literature that negatively impacts the rural American economy is the lack of population density and infrastructure to effectively attract new industry (Barkley, 1995; Crump & Merrett, 1998). As these and other studies indicate, high-skill service industries rely on strong communication networks and close proximity (or at least direct travel routes) to suppliers and customers. Because isolated, rural areas often are unable to provide either of these to industry, industry leaders often make the very difficult, but economically

sound, decision to relocate to more urban areas. This allows access to these needed resources and often at a much lower cost due to proximity.

Even though overall costs that are associated with relocating to urban locales are significant, the long-term benefit of access to advanced communication, a more skilled workforce, and major shipping routes almost always outweigh the benefits of remaining in rural locations (Gibbs, et al., 2005). Because rural areas simply do not provide the same opportunities and advantages of their urban counterparts, they continue to lag in their ability to attract new or expanding industry. Because of this, Gibbs (2002) suggests that rural areas continue to struggle in a goods-based economy, which primarily includes agriculture, fishing, mining, and traditional manufacturing, while urban areas continue to thrive in a service-based, high-skill-driven economy. The divide continues to widen.

Locating in a rural location, with its cheap land and low wages, is a benefit to consider; however, with that decision often comes the downside of less educated, lower-skilled workers, less access to strong communication systems and efficient transportation, and less access to education outlets that support administrative, research, and development opportunities (Gibbs, et al., 2005). The negatives of locating in rural areas currently outweigh the potential positives for industry.

An additional factor that emerges from the literature that often directly impacts an industry's decision to relocate from a rural area is limited access to higher education and skill development training programs; namely, career and technical training programs (Barkley, 1995; Teixeira & Swaim, 1991). As many studies indicate, the lifeblood of modern industry is access to a highly skilled workforce. As jobs continue the shift from a goods-based to a service-based skill set, the reliance on skill-specific training and preparation is becoming more and more apparent.

As this shift continues, the lack of such higher-level preparatory opportunities has become just another reason for industry to make the decision to abandon its rural location to move to areas that can provide academic and training opportunities, as well as a consistent pipeline of skilled workers to fill key positions.

As has been demonstrated, the preponderance and severity of rural American poverty can be attributed to a number of factors, many of which can be linked to past social and economic development policies at the federal level and the ongoing economic transformation referenced above (Wojan, 2000). Rural areas lag far behind their urban competitors and this presents quite the quandary for economic development corporations in rural areas as they struggle to remain viable in the market. As a result of this struggle, rural areas become increasingly isolated and vulnerable to negative effects that stem from economic change. It is up to rural economic and political leadership, along with a healthy dose of assistance from state and federal government, to identify opportunities to for preparing a more highly skilled workforce and laying the foundation for becoming more attractive to potential industry or expansion of existing industry.

Rural economic development initiatives

While the overall decline in industry and economy has been apparent for the past half-decade or longer, the sting has been felt most prominently in the rural regions of the nation (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002). For a wide variety of reasons, some of which have been outlined in the previous section, rural communities and regions have experienced a particularly difficult time retaining industry. Such factors include manufacturing costs and taxes, cost associated with shipping, salaries of employees, lack of a skilled workforce (both in terms of numbers and in quality of training), among many other factors (Zekeri, 2013). With rural areas most often feeling the brunt of exiting industry and loss of job opportunities for the local citizenry, the

divide between the economic haves and have-nots continued to widen. With dwindling economies spiraling seeming out of control and economic depression looming, rural communities and regions across the nation began to realize that economic viability was becoming a growing concern.

Over the past twenty years, during the Clinton, Bush, and Obama presidencies, the federal government recognized the impending crisis and began working with federal agencies to enact legislation intended to assist and incentivize rural communities to rally together and develop community-wide efforts aimed at stimulating economic growth by attracting industry (Zekeri, 2013). As more and more federal initiatives were developed and implemented at the state-level, one aspect that was consistently apparent in the organization of these programs was the emphasis on community – involving stakeholder groups that represent a variety of sectors from the community. Studies by Crowe and Smith (2012), Flora and Flora (2013), and Green and Haines (2008), to name just a few, all indicate that a hallmark of successful rural economic development efforts is collaboration among all sectors of the community. As each of these studies indicate, no one sector of the community is capable of salvaging the economy on its own; however, “industry development through the use of built capital and natural capital equate to community-wide effort to develop local business and industry” (Zekeri, 2013, p. 1). Thus, the path to success in rural economic development is somewhat clear: involve the various stakeholder groups within the community and that community has a chance to strengthen the economy.

Following are a number of economic develop initiatives that have been developed by federal agencies that specifically target economically disadvantaged areas of the nation:

Community vision projects. With support from the Rural Development Initiative, the state of Illinois developed its Illinois Valley 20/20 Community Vision in the spring of 2016 (Rural Development Initiatives, 2016). With assistance from RDI, the community embarked upon a strategic planning process aimed at creating a vision for the growth of business and industry in the region. This vision-casting process was dependent upon the involvement of all sectors of the community. Through a series of public forums and input gathering, community leadership was able to develop an action plan that relied upon the engagement of all stakeholder groups and a system of accountability to one another for meeting goals and growing the local economy.

Investing in manufacturing communities partnership. In May 2013, the Obama administration announced the launch of the Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership, an initiative aimed at jumpstarting the growth of manufacturing and job creation across the nation (U.S. Economic Development Administration, 2013). The program employs a multi-phase approach to implementation. Phase One involves collaboration among the Department of Commerce, the Small Business Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency in awarding 25 grants of up to \$200,000 apiece for regions that are able to collaboratively develop long-term economic development strategies intended to attract, retain, and/or expand investments and stimulate growth in industry and foreign trade. One key aspect of the strategies that must be developed by communities or regions that apply for these grants is the insistence of community stakeholder involvement as part of the planning and implementation process, as well as ongoing evaluation of the initiative.

Phase Two, which was initiated as part of the 2014 federal budget, commissions the Department of Commerce to award five “Challenge” grants, which could result in communities or regions being awarded up to \$25 million each. Supplemented by various federal agencies,

these awards are given to communities for having “the best long-term strategies for attracting private investment and increasing manufacturing and exports, and should combine many of the elements companies seek when they are deciding where to locate” (U.S. Economic Development Administration, 2013, p. 1). Such factors include specialized research centers at local universities; community college programs to train workers in targeted industries; a business community that is focused on targeted technology sectors; public works projects to upgrade infrastructure; and an engaged community of local government, education, workforce, and the business community.

In 2014, as part of Phase Two of the program, twelve manufacturing communities from across the nation were announced as recipients of the first round of grants. These communities include Pittsburgh, PA; San Antonio, TX; New Orleans, LA; Madison, WI; Memphis, TN; Peoria, IL; Minneapolis, MN; Twin Falls, ID; Portland, OR; Provo, UT; Hartford, CT; and Fresno, CA (U.S. Economic Development Administration, 2015). Eleven federal agencies are slated to provide coordinated support for the initiatives that are developed by each community. Further, over \$1 billion is available to assist with the implementation of the strategies of these twelve cities and their accompanying economic regions. The hallmark of the application process is its emphasis on collaboration among all community stakeholder groups.

Work ready Philadelphia. Closely related to many other Work Ready programs that have been implemented across the United States, Work Ready Philadelphia focuses on workforce development in school-age children in economically vulnerable sections of Philadelphia, PA (Work Ready Philadelphia, 2015). As the Work Ready program was developed and implemented, city leaders determined that the most appropriate course of action would be to target the city’s disadvantaged youth. Considering that many of Philadelphia’s working-age

youth were out of work and creating a financial drain on public assistance programs, the Work Ready Philadelphia steering committee set forth to engage representatives from local business and industry, the public school systems, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, labor unions, and private investors in a collaborative effort to develop a program that would ensure consistent outcomes and improved economic development through a strong workforce strengthening program.

The focus of the Philadelphia Work Ready program is to close the skills gap that exists among a growing population of local youth. Through collaboration between groups labeled as Providers (youth-serving organizations that offer educationally-rich, career exposure opportunities), Employers (establishing shadowing, mentoring, and apprenticeship opportunities for youth), and Investors (public and private donors with a stake in the growth and economic viability of the community), community stakeholders work together to develop a plan with a variety of wraparound services, both in the schools and in the community, to prepare the city's youth for employment opportunities and the skills necessary to maintain those opportunities.

Stronger economies together. The SET economic development program in western Nevada was developed out of Western Nevada Development District leadership's involvement in an economic development training in Reno, Nevada in 2014. Like many other rural areas across the nation, the WNDD was facing economic hardship. Employment rates were continuing to decline as a result of a loss of industry to other states and countries. Another contributing factor was the ever-dwindling level of qualified workers to fill the demand of highly skilled positions in business and industry. Because this was a regional concern and not just one that impacted individual communities, the economic development boards of the western Nevada region vowed to stand together to develop a program to address the current economic woes.

Region-wide, the collaboration of communities worked together to develop a vision for improving the quality of life and economic opportunities for all citizens. As the SET steering committee worked together over a period of almost a year, the team announced its plan to target specific economic sectors that offered the best opportunities growth. These included Agribusiness, Connectivity (broadband internet and increased development of roadways), Energy (efficiency and alternative sources), and Tourism (development of additional high-profile festivals and celebrations that will attract tourists). While the work of this group is ongoing, evidence suggests that they have made great strides toward meeting their goal of strengthening their economic future and elevating its standing as an economic competitor.

Rural community development initiative. In 2015, the United States Department of Agriculture announced a grant program that targets economically disadvantaged towns in Appalachian Tennessee and Kentucky, as well rural areas throughout the Midwestern United States (United States Department of Agriculture, 2015). The purpose of the RCDI grants, ranging in awards from \$125,000 to over \$250,000, is to fund community-based organizations in assisting communities to create more job opportunities for rural residents, as well as develop financial literacy skills, grow economic development activities, build adequate housing, provide access to higher education, and other initiatives that will strengthen the workforce and demonstrate commitment to current and potential employers.

Initially, \$6.3 million was provided by the USDA to fund 31 projects around the nation, spanning seven states. The aim of the grant program, as outlined in a public announcement by (former) President Obama, is to “allow rural America to find a way – strengthening America’s economy, small towns and rural communities” (United States Department of Agriculture, 2015, p. 1).

The federal government-sponsored programs described above are just a few of many that have been introduced to rural and economically disadvantaged states and regions of the country over the past 20 years. Various initiatives have met with mixed results; however, the majority appear grounded in the belief that the most vital component to the long-term success of any economic development venture is collaboration and the commitment exhibited by community stakeholders to taking a unified approach to economic improvement.

Kentucky's Work Ready Communities initiative

After many other states across the nation had already begun initiating various workforce and economic development initiatives over the past twenty to twenty-five years, the Commonwealth of Kentucky finally made the decision to look internally to attempt to identify factors that were contributing to the downturn of the economy across the state (United States Department of Agriculture, 2016). The Kentucky state legislature was the catalyst for this state-wide review of services and programs, ranging from K-12 education to postsecondary education to Career and Technical education programs to economic development programs and beyond (Helphinstine, Helphinstine, & King, 2008). What began initially as a joint initiative with the state's Office of Career and Technical Education (OCTE) and the Division of Career and Technical Education division of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to review secondary technical programs quickly spread to community, regional, and state-wide agencies as a thorough examination of outdated and ineffective practices that were contributing factors to the economic downturn.

Over roughly an eight-year period, from 2001 through early-2008, Kentucky legislators worked closely with OCTE and KDE, as well as with new task forces that were formed during this period, to determine both the quality of workforce development programs and whether or not

they were truly meeting industry standards (Helphinstine, et al., 2008). Additionally, an aim of the study was to identify gaps in workforce preparation. These gaps, caused by a variety of factors that were not limited to Career and Technical education shortcomings, were strong contributing factors to the loss of industry in the Commonwealth; thus, resulting in the momentum of the economic downturn of Kentucky (Helphinstine, et al., 2008). As anticipated, lawmakers concluded that Kentucky was falling significantly short in workforce development measures and determined that this was one of the primary contributors to the rapid loss of industry and sagging economy. It was time for a change.

Upon conclusion of the extensive state-wide review by the state legislature, lawmakers concluded that it was time to initiate an organized approach to strengthening Kentucky's workforce and re-attracting business and industry to the region (Roenker, 2016). In 2012, after considering a variety of workforce development programs that had been initiated across the nation, Kentucky legislators commissioned the recently-formed Kentucky Workforce Investment Board (KWIB) with the task of determining or designing a program that would best suit the economic and workforce needs of Kentucky (McLean, 2014). KWIB soon returned with a proposal from The ACT Corporation that was known as the ACT Work Ready Communities certification program.

While many other states had previously adopted programs under the name of Work Ready, ACT, long known for its work with college entrance exams, had recently developed a program that can be used to assess fundamental work skills and had already gained traction among industry site selectors in states like Georgia and Oklahoma (Roenker, 2016). This new program, titled Work Ready Communities, was developed to provide city and county officials a method for informing potential employers of preparedness of local workforces in a quantifiable

and nationally recognized manner (ACT Work Ready Communities, 2011). Mark Arend, editor of Site Selection Magazine, states that the Work Ready Communities program is a “quantifiable measure of how many workers there are with skills employers may be looking for. States and counties really should be doing this because it separates communities that talk about skill availability from those that can actually demonstrate their available skill sets” (Roemaker, 2016, p. 2).

For communities that are interested in pursuing the ACT Work Ready Communities certification, the state and local community must commit to the following ACT Common Criteria (ACT Work Ready Communities, 2011), which includes:

- Business and industry communicating exactly what foundational skills they need for a productive workforce
- Individuals in the community understanding what skills are required by employers, and taking the necessary steps to prepare themselves for success
- Policy makers consistently measuring the skills gap in a timely manner at the national, state, and local levels
- Educators working to close the skills gap, via tools integrated into career pathways with stackable industry-recognized credentials
- Economic developers utilizing an on-demand reporting tool to market the quality of their workforce

One of several differences that sets Kentucky’s Work Ready Communities program apart from the Work Ready initiatives of other states is that the six pieces of the certification criteria are very specific and rigorous. The six parameters of the program measure workers’ educational

achievement, work preparedness, and digital literacy, with additional measures to gauge overall local commitment to the Work Ready initiative by stakeholders (Roenker, 2016). Robert Curry, Kentucky's Work Ready Communities Executive Director, says that it is with intention that the state board established the criteria for Work Ready certification to be more stringent than those in other states (McLean, 2014). "Achieving this certification, or even the In-progress designation, demonstrates to employers that the county is committed to providing a pipeline of qualified workers for existing business and a qualified workforce for potential new employers or expansion of industry already in the community" (McLean, 2014, p. 2).

In order to earn the Work Ready certification, a community must meet each of the following criteria of the program (ACT Work Ready Communities, 2011):

- High School Graduation Rate – Must demonstrate a minimum of 88% high school graduation rate with a plan to increase to 98% by 2022.
- National Career Readiness Certification (NCRC) – 9% of the working-age population must earn the certificate within three years of starting the program and increase to 15% within five years.
- Community Commitment – A specified variety of community stakeholders must commit to having central roles in the application process. This includes local economic development entities, elected officials, local school superintendents, workforce investment boards, area development districts, and business and industry leaders.
- Educational Attainment – 25% of the local working-age population must hold at least a two-year college degree. The community must have a plan in place to increase that percentage to 32% in three years and 39% in five years.

- **Soft Skills** – The community must have a program or plan in place to help educate its workforce about “soft skills” that have been identified by employers as key to success. This includes attendance, being on time, developing strong work ethic, dressing appropriately, communicating well, and interpersonal skills.
- **High-Speed Internet Access** – At least 90% of homes in the community must have access to high-speed internet. Access is a measure of digital literacy for the community.

As of 2016, 80 of the 120 counties in Kentucky have shown some level of interest in participating in the Work Ready Communities certification program, ranging from earning the community certification to forming committees to explore the opportunity (Roenker, 2016). As Executive Director of the Kentucky Work Ready Communities initiative, Robert Curry’s stated goal is for as many Kentucky counties as possible to become engaged in the Work Ready initiative (McLean, 2014). Why? In addition to many of the counties that have achieved the certification being successful in attracting new or expanding industry, the unifying message that often comes from counties that have participated in the certification program is that the process of working toward certification is as valuable as achieving the certification itself (Roenker, 2016). This is because the program encourages networking across sectors within the community that is unlike any other initiative that most communities experience.

Kim Huston, president of the Nelson County, Kentucky Economic Development Board states, “For the first time, our educators and business and industry leaders were engaged in dialogue. The superintendents were hearing firsthand from industry what the workforce is lacking and what they need for a better-equipped workforce. You can’t get any more credible proof of community buy-in than to have that kind of dialogue beginning” (Roenker, 2016, p. 3). To date, 17 Kentucky counties have received the Work Ready designation, with 20 more close

behind. While there are currently mixed results with regard to the attraction or expansion of industry, the program is still in its early years; yet, many counties report similar findings as those in Nelson County: one of the greatest benefits that comes from involvement in the community certification process is the unity and camaraderie that develops as a result of coming together and rallying around a community improvement initiatives.

Case Subject: Daviess County, Kentucky

With a population of just under 100,000, Daviess County, Kentucky lies in the rural, northwestern region of Kentucky on the banks of the Ohio River and bordering southern Indiana. It was founded in 1815 and is named for Major Joseph Hamilton Daviess, a United States Attorney famous for attempting to prosecute Aaron Burr. Daviess County is bordered by the following counties: Hancock, McLean, Ohio, Henderson, Warrick (IN), and Spencer (IN).

According to the 2016 United States Census (www.census.gov), the demographic makeup of Daviess County is comprised of 93.69% White, 4.35% Black or African-American, 0.92% Hispanic or Latino, 0.43% Asian, 0.13% Native American, with the remaining categorized as “Other Races.” Traditionally, Daviess County has been known as one of Kentucky’s primary centers of Kentucky bourbon distilling, with as many as 20 distilleries operating at one time in the pre-Prohibition years of the late-1800s. In addition to distilling spirits, Daviess County has also been widely known for its coal mining industry, particularly in the southwest portion of the county, which forms the northeast corner of the Pennyryle coal fields region.

While distilling and coal mining flourished for over parts of multiple centuries, both have faltered during the past 50 years. One underground and one surface mine continue to operate in

the county, while only three bourbon distilleries out of the 59 that have previously operated in the county remain. Situated close to primary waterways and highways that are advantageous for trade, Daviess County is a prime spot for industry location and development. Unfortunately, the industries that were so vibrant and prevalent to the area during the previous century have dwindled and are less able to take advantage of the county's prime geographic position in the region. While the overall economy of Daviess County is relatively stable, growth in industry has seen continued decline over the past few decades.

Daviess County leaders concluded that the county had to act in order to boost its economy and continue to be viable in attracting industry to its advantageous geographic location in the state. When the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board (now referred to as the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board, or KWIB) introduced the Kentucky Work Ready Communities certification program in 2012, community leaders in Daviess County made the decision to pursue the designation because of their perception of the possibilities that the program presented for the local economy. By having a strong public school system and post-secondary education partners within the county, as well as strong, supportive community leadership interested in growth, Daviess County was successful in earning the Work Ready Communities designation; in fact, they were the first county in Kentucky to do so. The purpose of this case study was not to determine Daviess County's success in earning the Work Ready Community certification; rather, it was to examine the community's process for achieving the designation and to determine whether or not the certification has resulted in attracting new industry and stimulating growth in the local economy.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design process that was selected for this qualitative study. After outlining the overall purpose of the research, researcher questions that guide the study are posed. Following the purpose setting parameters of the study, the population that was selected to provide informative data, as well as procedures that were employed to gather the desired data and safeguard the anonymity of participants, are identified.

The chapter concludes with an exposition related to the instruments that were used to gather data, as well as the procedures that were utilized by the researcher to analyze the data that was collected from interviews with community stakeholders. While one of the primary purposes of the study was to share the experience of one western Kentucky community in its attempt to bolster its economic sector through a workforce development initiative, a secondary purpose was to provide an example of success for other communities that wish to undertake a similar initiative for similar purposes.

Research Design

Upon receiving project approval from Murray State University's Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), the researcher initiated the study. After selecting one western Kentucky county to examine for the purposes of the study, the researcher planned face-to-face interviews of various initiative stakeholders to gather data necessary to the completion of said study. Selected participants from the Work Ready Communities initiative in the county of study represented the various stakeholder groups that are either required or suggested for demonstration of community commitment, which is one of the six criteria of the Work Ready Communities program. These stakeholder groups included, but were not limited to: K-12 and

higher education representatives, city and county government, business and industry representatives, local business owners, and the local Economic Development Corporation. After soliciting participation in the study, the researcher conducted voluntary, face-to-face interviews with selected subjects in an attempt to gain additional insight into the initiative's process, achieved successes, concerns, and additional considerations that may prove valuable to future research studies or community applications for the WRC initiative.

Once all data was gathered via interviews, the researcher examined and coded all responses for the purpose of identifying patterns of responses and to accurately represent the experiences of the selected community in achieving the Work Ready Communities certification. This approach provided clearer insight into the community's experience, as well as identified suggested steps for future researchers or interested parties to consider or continue researching.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine one western Kentucky community's approach to workforce and economic development utilizing the Work Ready Communities initiative sponsored by the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board. Specific attention was given to how the community-wide effort was implemented, expected and unanticipated successes that were realized, as well as how the program has improved the economic standing of the community. Ultimately, the outcome of the study aimed to provide other rural communities that are attempting to identify opportunities to strengthen their workforce and local economy with a successful model that may be adapted to local, unique circumstances. By identifying and examining a story of success, other rural communities that are struggling with similar workforce and economic issues may find a blueprint for success, or at the very least a starting point for developing their own approach to addressing their economic woes.

Research Questions

1. How has achieving the Work Ready certification positively impacted economic development in the community?
2. What are the perceptions among community stakeholders concerning workforce development approaches as a result of the Work Ready Communities initiative?

Population

The researcher sought a voluntary sample of involved stakeholders in the Work Ready Communities initiative in the identified community that were known by the researcher to have been directly involved in the various activities related to completion of the community certification. Participants, as described below, were recruited by the researcher via email invitation (Appendix B) or other personal contact to complete a 30- to 45-minute, face-to-face interview. Familiarity between the researcher and the identified population was of minimal concern, considering that the population in question was in no way connected to the researcher at the time of the study.

The population invited for participation in the face-to-face interviews was twenty-five individuals, all with active participation in Daviess County's initiative. Despite a relatively small population of potential participants, the researcher was able to achieve a deep understanding of participant and community experience with the Work Ready Communities certification process from the study's sample. As a result, the researcher was afforded the ability to present a rich description of the experience.

Participants

Participants in the study were nine adults from the identified population of community stakeholders directly involved in the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County. Each of the nine met the researcher's criteria for participation, which included being a member of at least one of the WRC-identified community stakeholder groups and active engagement in the county's initiative. In addition to representing the required stakeholder groups of the economic development initiative, members from each of these stakeholder groups contributed significantly to the successful completion of the certification program by serving as leaders of various subcommittees, as well as encouraging community involvement and support.

Sampling Procedures

Community stakeholders representing all required populations of the Work Ready Communities initiative were issued an emailed invitation to participate in an interview related to their participation in and perceptions of the initiative in their community. The twenty-five individuals that were invited for interviews included local school district leaders, local post-secondary institution leaders and Career and Technical Education personnel, representatives from the local Area Development District, representatives of the local Chamber of Commerce, city leaders from Owensboro, members of the Economic Development Corporation, and representatives from county government.

Utilizing a convenience sample from those invited to participate, the volunteer participants, consisting of six females and three males, all Caucasian, and ranging in age from 33 to 65, were identified for participation in the study. Once this population was identified, a follow-up email invitation was sent to the subjects, thanking them for agreeing to participate and

inviting them to schedule a convenient time on the dates provided to meet for the interview. The invitation included an explanation of the study and its purposes, the informed consent information, as well as a link to interview questions for participant review. The intent of the interview was to collect the informed consent participation agreement (Appendix C) and respondent data for analysis.

Once correspondence and interview time and location scheduling was completed with each member of the sample, the researcher travelled to Owensboro to conduct the interviews. The interview locations identified were a combination of convenience for the participants and privacy for both the researcher and participant identities. During the interviews, audio recordings were utilized, as were hand-written notes. Upon completion of each interview, hand-written notes were compared to audio recordings to ensure accuracy. Further, transcribed notes from the interviews were emailed individually to each participant for their review and verification. Once the interview transcripts were verified by participants, the researcher began the process of coding to identify emerging themes.

Risk

What participants were asked to do: Participants were solicited to participate in a face-to-face interview with a duration of approximately thirty (30) to forty-five (45) minutes in length. As part of the data gathering process, participants were asked to share their experiences as they relate to the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County and their perceptions regarding perceived success or growth in the community as a result. Additionally, they were asked questions related to their role and/or contributions within the initiative.

Cost of participation: There was no cost to subjects for their participation in the study.

Risks of participation: The risks from participation in the study were minimal. Participants were not expected to experience physical or emotional trauma or stress during the course of their participation in the study and none reported such experiences throughout the interview process. While the researcher cannot with certainty guarantee the anonymity of participants, due to the involvement of interviews, necessary steps have been taken to protect the name, email address, and any additional identifiable information from appearing in the final report.

Benefits of participation: Participants in the study were told that they may request to receive a copy of the final report. The final report shares the successful experience of Daviess County's Work Ready Communities initiative and provides other communities with important information for potential future endeavors related to improvement of the workforce and local economies.

Compensation: Compensation for participation was not provided to subjects, nor was it promised. Participation in this study was voluntary, as initially advertised.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the research study was strictly voluntary. Participants were informed from the time they were recruited that they may discontinue their participation in the study at any time and for any reason. If a participant had chosen to withdraw prior to completion of his or her portion of the study, they were informed that their responses up to the point of withdrawal would not be utilized as part of the study nor in calculation of its results.

Confidentiality

The researcher took careful steps to keep participant information, including personal identity, confidential. Given the nature of the data-gathering process, the researcher cannot guarantee ongoing participant confidentiality with certainty. Even so, strong efforts will be made by the researcher to maintain confidentiality of responses and anonymity of participants' identities.

Research Instrumentation

Perception data was collected from subjects of the study via face-to-face interviews. The researcher developed an interview instrument to utilize with individuals that have been directly and/or indirectly associated with the Work Ready initiative in Daviess County. As previously mentioned, participation in the survey was voluntary and the initial email contact included an informed consent document for review and agreement by survey participants. Informed consent was secured prior to the initiation of each interview.

The data collection interview contained seven open-ended questions that were used primarily for the purpose of obtaining stakeholder perception regarding the community's participation the Work Ready certification initiative (Appendix D). Interview questions included the following:

1. Please describe your role in the Work Ready initiative in your community.
2. From your perspective, why and how did the community become involved in the Work Ready certification program?
3. In your opinion, was this truly a community-wide initiative? If so, how did that happen? If not, what prevented that from happening?

4. As a result of the Work Ready initiative, what is now occurring in the community in terms of workforce development that was not occurring previously?
5. As a result of this experience, has your community been successful in attracting new industry?
6. If possible, please describe 2 or 3 positive outcomes for your community as a result of its participation in the Work Ready certification initiative.
7. What would be your top 3 suggestions or pieces of advice for a community that is considering initiating the Work Ready certification program?

There were no questions included in the interview that should have made the participants uncomfortable or unwilling to participate. In fact, none of the participants expressed concern nor declined any parts of the interview process at any time. All were completely agreeable and expressed satisfaction with all aspects of the interviews.

Procedures for Data Analysis

Upon completion of participant interviews, the researcher completed an initial review of data with the goal of identifying patterns among responses signifying themes or categories within the data. Utilizing an initial hand-coding process, specific similarities and differences were identified and categorized to form the basis of emerging themes.

After initial coding was completed, the researcher utilized a digital qualitative data analysis software program (Dedoose) to assist with a secondary effort to identify themes or categories within participant responses. Once both coding methods were completed, the researcher compared his initial hand-coding process with the results of the online coding process

to identify similarities and differences, make revisions as necessary, and generate results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative research study utilizes a case study approach to examine one western Kentucky community's attempt to improve economic and workforce development utilizing Kentucky's Work Ready Communities approach. Introduced in 2012 by the Workforce Innovation Board (WIB), the Work Ready Communities initiative intends to raise the level of community achievement in the areas of High School Graduation Rate, National Career Readiness Certificate earners, Community Commitment, Educational Attainment, Soft Skills development, and Digital Literacy (as measured by availability of broadband internet access within the community) for the purpose of strengthening the available workforce and improving economic development opportunities. The western Kentucky community that is the focus of this study, Daviess County, was successful in earning the Work Ready Communities certification and is experiencing success in improving workforce development and attracting new business and industry to the community and region.

The purpose of the study was to chronicle the success of Daviess County, Kentucky in its economic development initiative, as well as to answer the following research questions:

1. How has achieving the Work Ready certification positively impacted economic development in the community?
2. What perceptions exist among community stakeholders that indicate optimism and/or a perceived improvement in workforce development approaches as a result of the Work Ready initiative?

Chapter 4 guides the reader through the research process and findings, including

a description of research participants, the process for gathering information, and the process for transcribing and analyzing the data. The researcher then presents analysis identifying themes that emerged from data transcription, coding, and triangulation. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings and closing thoughts.

Qualitative Findings and Analysis

For this qualitative research study, the researcher interviewed nine Daviess County community stakeholders from a pool of twenty-five potential participants that were initially invited to participate. Each of the twenty-five potential subjects were members of various stakeholder groups that played a specific role in the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County, Kentucky, and were sent email invitations with an explanation of the research study. The nine subjects that voluntarily participated in the research study represent a cross section of community stakeholder groups that contributed to the success of the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County.

The interviews that were utilized to gather information for the study were structured to elicit perception data regarding the process and perceived success of the certification program in improving workforce and overall economic development in the community. The researcher devoted parts of three days in the community to meet with participants at private interview locations and gather data for the study. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher transcribed interview responses for analysis.

Interviews

Upon completion of the interviews with participants, the researcher carefully transcribed and verified accuracy of the interviews with each participant prior to moving forward with

coding. Upon participant verification of transcript accuracy, the researcher began an initial hand-coding process by reviewing transcripts, identifying significant, repetitive key terms and ideas, and organizing these key ideas into categories. These categories formed the basis for development of themes and subthemes for the analysis. Following the initial coding process, the researcher uploaded the interview transcripts to the online coding program called Dedoose. The online research analysis utilized a broad application of the programmatic coding system, which was based on information from the literature review, subject interviews, as well as the research questions for the study. The initial coding system developed from the review of the transcripts was revised into more specific codes and sub-codes as the coding process progressed.

Upon completion of coding via the online platform, the researcher compared initial coding notations with those which were generated by the online platform. Utilizing this comparison, the researcher verified themes and revised final notations as necessary.

Analysis

Based on the nine interviews that were conducted as part of the study, as well as the subsequent coding processes, the following three overarching themes were identified for the Daviess County, Kentucky community and their economic development initiative: Success Emerges When a Community Comes Together; A Collective Vision for Success is Vital; and Collaborative Relationships Among Stakeholder Groups Open Doors.

Theme I: Success Emerges When a Community Comes Together. Over the course of interviewing the nine participants, the sentiment of collaboration and unity among stakeholder groups and various segments of the Daviess County community was verbalized in a variety of ways; however, this particular theme was able to be broken into two very distinct subthemes: one

which focuses specifically on implementation of the Work Ready Communities initiative, and the other which gives a more personal view of the relationships that exist among stakeholder groups in Daviess County, Kentucky and aided their success.

Engaging recommended Work Ready Communities stakeholders.. A number of study participants commented on the process of recruiting and engaging key community stakeholders to the initiative. According to Participant 3, “While the composition of the Work Ready steering committee is specific, selling the initiative here was relatively simple. Because we already have strong city/county government and educational leadership, they could see the potential value of this initiative from the beginning.” Participant 2 provided similar insight regarding recruitment of community partners. “We really didn’t have any major issues getting key people on board. In the past, these people have been willing to get involved in other community projects; so, it was the same with this initiative. We asked and they were willing.”

Participant 7 suggested the key to getting other stakeholders on board with the initiative was the direct involvement and recruitment efforts of one of the other study participants. “(This person) has been involved in so many state-wide initiatives, served in state leadership positions, and has spearheaded many economic development and education initiatives in Daviess County. The fact that (this person) was heading this up and asking people to get involved made it even more legitimate and hard to say no.” Participant 6 also mentioned the importance of this individual’s involvement, but also added, “We’ve had a lot of success with initiatives (this person) has led or at least been actively involved in, but we also have several other leaders around the community that are strong contributors. They’re very community focused and are willing to pitch in and get things done.”

Throughout the entirety of the interview process, participants frequently commented on the strong leadership that is provided in Daviess County by the Economic Development Corporation. “Our Economic Development group was definitely the catalyst of this initiative. They assembled a group of leaders from across the county to introduce the Work Ready program and to pitch the idea. The central question of their presentation was, ‘How can we make education more relevant in our community and region?’ From there, the discussion took off. The answer to this question is important to all aspects of the community” (Participant 7). Participant 5 echoed this sentiment: “Our Economic Development folks did a fantastic job recruiting all the right partners from education, industry, business, local government, and even the news media. This was a big deal because all of these groups have a stake in the success of initiatives like this.” Participant 9 added, “Our Economic Development board provides a lot of leadership in initiatives that are helpful to our community. Any time we need to get something done for the city of Owensboro or Daviess County, you can usually count on them being a big part of it because they want what’s best for this area. We all do.”

Before the Work Ready Communities initiative was introduced, there had been some smaller-scale collaborative efforts within the community. As a result of those previous efforts, existing relationships were present and there was a certain level of trust that already existed. Even so, according to participants, the introduction of the Work Ready Communities initiative was one of the first large-scale initiatives of this type that was ventured in Daviess County and involved this level of whole-community commitment. According to Participant 6, “Once the idea was pitched by the former Economic Development director, there was very little hesitation to get on board by the Economic Development Corporation, our County Judge-Executive, and other leaders in the community. It just made sense for us to do this.” Participant 2 shared a similar

viewpoint, stating, “I think the timing was right for an initiative like Work Ready. The working relationship among community and education leaders was already there and so was a pretty solid vision. When this concept was presented, it really didn’t take a lot of convincing to get us on board because it just seemed like a logical next-step to some of the things we were already doing.” Participant 8 added, “We’ve been working together on things like this for several years. This initiative was just another in the growing list of community development projects that we’ve worked together on. We have some strong leaders here who are willing to take chances, and they get things done.” Participant 5 added, “It’s just the way we’ve been doing things around here for the last decade. It works for us.”

While getting the Work Ready Communities initiative started in each community may not always be as quick and painless as the interview participants represented it being for Daviess County, interview responses indicate that previous collaborative ventures and relationship-building has been the key to successful community projects for this particular community. “Many of the leaders around the table, when the Work Ready idea was presented, had already worked together on various initiatives and trust was there. Because we were somewhat like-minded in our interest to help our community, we very quickly determined that this was something we wanted for Daviess County, and this was the core group to get it done” (Participant 1). Participant 3 added, “Once the vision was cast and the decision was made to move forward with the Work Ready initiative, stakeholders from all areas of the prescribed list were present, engaged, and ready to do their part.” Further, Participant 9 responded, “For the most part, almost all of the people who were supposed to be involved in Work Ready had already been involved in many of our other development projects. You can always count on many of these folks to step up and be involved. It’s why we have so many good things going on here.”

Establishing and maintaining professional community relationships. As previously reported, one of the key aspects of the success of the Work Ready initiative in Daviess County was the presence of a strong, collaborative relationship among community leaders. As the interviews were conducted, participants repeatedly attested to the strength of the community that has developed as a direct result of strong leadership, open communication, and like-mindedness. As a direct result of this collaborative factor, success in initiating the Work Ready Communities initiative was favorable. According to Participant 1, “We have such a strong Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation, and educational leadership in the public and post-secondary schools. We all communicate and work together so well and often. That was a huge advantage from the very beginning of the Work Ready program. We already knew what kind of support we’d have because we’ve seen it before.” Participant 7 added, “We have such strong community partnerships. With this being a pretty small area, we all know each other so well and trust one another. It makes efforts like this pleasant and successful.”

Multiple participants (Participants 3 and 6, in particular) mentioned that Owensboro/Daviess County has been recognized by *Southern Business and Development Magazine* as one of the “Best in the South” as a result of its workforce and economic development initiatives. However, while other cities and counties on the list may have the advantage of geographical proximity to major interstate highways, international airports, major universities, and other advantages, this is not the case with Daviess County. In fact, county leadership determined several years ago that it must harness other areas of strength in order to overcome some of its geographic shortcomings. “Considering where we are geographically, we realize our biggest capital is people. Regardless of where you work or what you do, we all realize that and that’s what helps bring us together on projects like this, as well as several others over

the years” (Participant 8). Participant 1 took this a step further, stating, “We have a strong sense of what our limitations are, but we also have discovered our strength, and that’s people. Human capital is what drives us and makes us strong. Unlike some places that haven’t quite figured it out, we have the right people who also share our strong vision for Daviess County and the region. When you’ve got that, that’s hard to beat.”

While not located near a major, international airport, interstate highway, or large university, Owensboro/Daviess County does have several factors that make it ripe for development of a strong workforce and ability to grow economically. In addition to strong community leadership and a public and post-secondary education system that is flexible, communicates regularly, is forward-thinking, and focuses on the needs of the community, one of the community’s biggest advantages is its history of collaboration and a demonstrated willingness to work together on community projects. “The reason the Work Ready initiative worked so well for us is because of the already-existing strong partnership we’ve enjoyed across the county before we were even introduced to Work Ready” (Participant 9). Participant 4 echoed this thought: “We’ve been walking that walk for several years already. We made the decision a while back that we are stronger when we work together. There have been a number of economic development-related projects that we’ve come to the table on and found success. It just works.” Participant 3 added, “I’ve lived in a few different places, but I’ve never been anywhere that has such unified community leadership. In just about every facet of the community, we have leaders who know each other and are willing and capable contributors to initiatives that will strengthen our community and economic base. I know I can always pick up the phone and ask for help or pitch an idea and there are leaders who will listen.”

Unanimously, interviews with the nine community stakeholders suggest that community focus, collaboration, and cooperation among a wide variety of community entities has been a strong key to the success of growing the local workforce and economy of Owensboro/Daviess County. “Collaboration is just the way we do business here. It’s been this way for at least 10 to 15 years. We don’t just talk the talk; we walk the walk” (Participant 6). Participant 8 agreed, “For several years now, community leadership has had a great working relationship, and that includes education leaders at all levels. We’ve been a pretty close-knit group and it’s been refreshing to be a part of a group from different backgrounds that can regularly come together and work for the common good of the community.” Participant 5 added, “Leaders have come and gone, over the years, but because of what has been established over at least the last decade, that cooperative spirit remains and is what makes Owensboro/Daviess County a special place.”

Almost all stakeholders interviewed suggested, in some form or another, that the key to successfully initiating a community-wide project like this is to foster a positive working relationship and a spirit of community mindedness among the various stakeholder groups. Participant 4 suggested that this may often be the missing link in the success of some communities when it comes to efforts like economic development: “If you can’t get an education system to see beyond test scores, or industry to see beyond bottom line dollars for the company, it’s hard to make community initiatives like this work. We have to get beyond the, ‘How do I benefit from this?’ mentality and start thinking more along the lines of, ‘How is what we’re doing adding value to the success of our community?’ We’re doing a better job of that now, but we also see other counties that aren’t there yet.” Participant 7 agreed, “We’ve been able to figure out what some other less successful communities haven’t yet: if we work together and have

common goals for the good of the community, we're bound to be more successful. Just look at the results we're seeing with community initiatives and growing industry."

Participant 1 added to the comments of Participants 4 and 7, "Part of the reason we're so solid as a community leadership team is that most of us grew up here and have known each other for years. Beyond that, though, is just our love for our community and our like-mindedness to see our community continue to grow. We want it for our families, but we also want it for the people of Daviess County." Participant 8 agreed, "We have some distinct advantages here. While Owensboro is a growing city, it's still small enough to where a lot of people are familiar with one another and are willing to work together. We've had a lot of success with community efforts, but we pride ourselves on being one community. That's the key for us."

Theme II: A Collective Vision for Success is Vital. While Theme I focused on the importance of getting the right people to commit to a community-wide economic development initiative like Work Ready Communities and fostering positive relationships throughout the community, the second theme that emerged from the study takes Theme I a step further by emphasizing the need to leverage those positive, collaborative relationships to determine a community vision for economic growth. As multiple study participants suggested, each community institution, whether it be business and industry, education, or city/county government, has its own ideas regarding issues facing the community and how these issues should be addressed; however, unless all stakeholders commit to coming together and working for the good of the community as one, it is very likely that a given community will continue to flounder, operating as if the "left hand does not know what the right hand is doing" (Participant 4).

The response to this mentality for Daviess County is vision-casting. Prior to ever introducing the concept of Work Ready Communities to any single community institution, economic leaders realized the importance of pulling together community leaders to discuss vision and direction for the community. Participant 8 reflected, “I wouldn’t even try to initiate something like Work Ready until you’ve got the ‘infrastructure’ in place. You really need to have a roundtable discussion with business, education, and local government to determine your vision, set some goals, assign some responsibilities, and nurture a strong, collaborative relationship. To do anything else is setting you up for potential frustration and failure.” Based upon what participants shared throughout the data-gathering portion of this study, this approach has become common for Daviess County. According to Participant 1, “Our leaders in economic development, government, and education committed several years ago to working together on community projects and issues. Because of the work that’s been done previously and the success we’ve seen over the years, it has really set the stage for coming together on the Work Ready project.” Participant 6 shared a similar thought, “In my role, I don’t often see the level of communication and collaboration between K-12 and post-secondary education that I see here, and that’s just one example of the way we all pull together and work toward the vision we have for Owensboro/Daviess County. Because of that approach, it really set the stage for success for Work Ready here.”

By taking the approach of vision-casting before initiating a community-wide project like Work Ready Communities and other initiatives, participants suggested that the end result has been trust, open-mindedness, and possibly even compromise. “One of the biggest things we’ve seen throughout this process, as well as other initiatives since then, is breaking down silos in education, industry, and other sectors of the community. It’s no longer about ‘me,’ per se. Now,

it's more often 'we' (Participant 2). Participant 3 shared a similar sentiment: "In the past, we, like so many other communities, were divergent thinkers concerned mainly with our little corner of the world. The way we approached Work Ready has taught us that we must be convergent thinkers and see how we can all add value to community initiatives. To help our community survive and continue to be viable economically, we have to approach community issues with an all-hands-on-deck mentality." Participant 9 added, "The fact that we've figured out and accepted the importance of determining vision before acting has made all the difference for us. I'm telling you, this has set the tone for pretty much every initiative we undertake now, including the Work Ready initiative. It's almost second nature and it works. It almost always works for us, and I believe it would work for just about any community."

Because previous collaborative initiatives bred trust, confidence, and positive results, stakeholders felt confident in the process and leadership and were willing to approach the economic question in much the same manner. "I really don't believe we would have ever reached consensus on the Work Ready criteria if it hadn't been for the collective leadership of the group and the strong vision we all worked together to develop from the beginning" (Participant 1). Participant 2 added, "We knew this initiative had a great chance at success because we have experienced many previous successes with initiatives that required a similar type of community collaboration."

This approach, according to community leaders, has become a staple strategy in a variety of situations in the community. Even though leaders in various sectors have come and gone, this process has become one that is now common in the Daviess County community. "We have learned the value of building relationships with other entities in our community, rather than trying to go it alone. That doesn't work. Many previous failed attempts have shown us that we

are much stronger when we unify around a common goal and support one another in reaching it. The Work Ready initiative is a perfect example of that, and we use it as a model when we take up other projects now” (Participant 5). Participant 3 added, “Like so many other communities, leadership positions have changed hands over the years; however, because of the collaborative culture that has been created here, we don’t really miss a beat. Leaders that have been a part of community projects here quickly build relationships with new leaders and show them how we work together here. It just really helps to keep things going in the right direction.” Participant 8 offered a similar perspective, “We’re able to keep that small town feel in Owensboro because of how closely knit our community and community leaders are. We all seem to be pulling in the same direction and that’s really inspiring for us when we’re faced with new projects and initiatives like Work Ready. We love our community and we have a vision for sustaining it.”

Throughout the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County, as well as subsequent community initiatives, community leaders have proven the value of collaboration around a collective vision. Participant 4 summed up this sentiment by stating, “This initiative and the success we’ve seen reinforces the importance of collective effort. We have strong leadership in so many sectors, but we have the success to prove how much more we can accomplish when we put egos aside and come together around a shared vision for our community. This process has become just as important as the individual leaders...maybe more so.” Participant 3 added, “Kudos to our Economic Development Corporation for leading the charge on collaborative community efforts. They set the tone long ago for collaboration and vision in this community, and our other community leaders have followed suit, breeding strong leadership across our community and success in efforts where we work together.”

Theme III: Collaborative Relationships Among Stakeholder Groups Open Doors.

As has been chronicled throughout the previous sections, collaboration and vision, developed over the years among the Daviess County community stakeholder groups, has led to a positive working and living environment and has opened the door to growing industry in the county and region. The actual proof is in the results. Each of the interview participants was able to give specific examples of new or expanded industry that has located in the Owensboro/Daviess County area within the past six-to-seven years. According to Participant 6, “We have been fortunate enough to attract some new industry to the area over the last several years. Some have cited our Work Ready certification and our commitment to workforce development; but what really seems to impress everyone is the genuine quality of collaboration that takes place here. They see that we’re all invested in growing Owensboro/Daviess County. It’s just how we operate now.” Participant 4 added, “People inside and outside of our community are always impressed with our economic stability. Some will ask, ‘How do you do it?’ The answer is in how we work together. Industry doesn’t just show up because of affordable property and strong labor. They look at many factors. The leaders who are a part of the Work Ready initiative all have a stake in attracting industry to this area. So far, we’ve done a pretty good job.”

Specific examples of industry that are now operating in or around Daviess County since county leadership espoused a different economic development approach include Alorica, Incorporated, a call center that has brought over 800 jobs to Owensboro; Old Nelly’s Distillery, a company capitalizing on the region’s growing bourbon industry; the Alleris, Incorporated expansion in Hancock County (adjacent to Daviess County), an aluminum-producing company that has added in excess of 250 jobs to the local economy; and U.S. Bank, which has added over 800 jobs to the Daviess County economy. These are just a few examples of economic growth in

and around the county over the last several years. This begs the question: “What accounts for this growth?” Participant 1 offered a perspective: “I think we could point to a few different factors, but what I have repeatedly heard from many of these companies is how impressed they are with the strong workforce that we are able to produce and our strategic commitment to economic development. The Work Ready certification is just one example of our community strategy. What we’re doing is making a difference.” Participant 7 added to this sentiment, “We’re doing a much better job of working together to strengthen our workforce, and that really has improved our community from an economic development standpoint. Combine that with how well our county leaders work together and that really seems to leave a great impression on companies and industry that are looking to locate to the area or expand their business.” Participant 3 added, “While we’ve got a strong economic development strategy and base, there are a number of factors that contribute to attracting industry here, including collaborative leadership, a strong education system that is developing the work force, a good quality of living, and several other factors that work together. Certainly, the Work Ready certification plays a role in demonstrating all of that.”

To experience results such as these, all community stakeholder groups must be engaged and committed to working from the ground up. This must often begin with the local education system. “In terms of workforce development to support our strategy, our colleges and public school systems are working closely together to create new opportunities for individuals to enter apprenticeship training programs, come back to finish school and earn certifications and extra training that will set them up for future work opportunities. County government established a scholarship program to support non-degree-completers (who left in good academic standing) who wanted to return to college to finish their degree but hadn’t previously been able to for one

reason or another. Everyone is so much more flexible and willing to support one another to help everyone reach their goals” (Participant 3). Participant 7 added, “I have lived and worked in other communities and have yet to see anywhere else where the public education system and the post-secondary education system communicate and collaborate so well. Not only that, but you also factor in the independent school system to that equation and it makes it even more impressive how closely they all work together. It’s pretty impressive.” Participant 8 offered a similar perspective. “Working in higher education, you don’t always see colleges and the public education system communicate well or cooperate at the level that we do here. I really think we’ve made a strong impact on economic growth in Daviess County simply by the way we work and plan together and help students get prepared for work. I am thrilled with the relationship we enjoy with the school system, and it just mirrors what is going on throughout our community

Another example of positive outcomes that develop through collaborative community efforts in Daviess County is the KY FAME program. More than half of the interview participants cited the introduction of the KY FAME program in Daviess County as being one of the most important outcomes of the renewed focus on workforce development. KY FAME, which stands for the Kentucky Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education, was developed as a partnership among regional manufacturers in central Kentucky whose purpose is to implement career pathway, apprenticeship-style educational programs that aim to create a pipeline of highly skilled workers (<http://kyfame.com>). With this program, regional manufacturers work with educational institutions (both secondary and post-secondary) and the public to develop industrial training programs that are designed to increase specific skill level attainment in the manufacturing industry. The goal of the program is to help prepare students to be job-ready upon completion of the program.

Daviess County leaders have seen great potential realized with the implementation of the KY FAME program. “KY FAME, with its focus on apprenticeships and workforce mentoring, is one of the biggest things to come from our involvement in the Work Ready program. Collectively, our stakeholders are self-assessing and asking, ‘Is what we’re doing sufficient? Is our focus where it should be? Are our policies and expectations for *our* benefit or are there things we can do differently to help our consumers and help Daviess County move forward?’ Because of these critical discussions, concepts like KY FAME are being developed and are making a big difference in our community” (Participant 5). Participant 1 added, “one of the things that I’m most proud of from the Work Ready initiative is the KY FAME program that was launched a few years ago. That is one of the hallmarks of the collaborative effort that brought us the Work Ready certification. Now, this program and other initiatives that have been launched are taking us to the next level in Daviess County.”

Now that the KY FAME program has been in place for several years, the level of collaboration among many sectors of the community continues to grow and rally around a program that benefits the entire community in so many different ways, including economic development through the continued attraction of new industry. According to study participants, the success of the KY FAME program has led to confidence from prospective industry looking to locate to the area, as well as from current industry in the region. “I continue to be so impressed with the growth of the KY FAME program in Daviess County. While we’re all so proud of the success of the program and all that it has done for our students and workforce, one of the things that has made me most proud is the collaboration among community leaders to help make it possible and to grow. It has been a game-changer for us” (Participant 3). Participant 2 stated, “Industry and other communities are taking notice of the things we’re doing here. Development

of programs like KY FAME are a big part of why you see present industry deciding to stay put and expand. They have confidence and satisfaction in what we're doing. Other communities are coming to us to find out what we're doing.”

Programs like the Work Ready Communities initiative are designed to bring community stakeholders with various backgrounds, areas of expertise, and public interest together to collaborate and solve community issues. In the case of Daviess County, Kentucky, it appears that this is occurring. While rural communities like Daviess County will always have to look for ways to remain competitive in the global market, particularly during this difficult economic time, this particular community seems to have found its niche by pooling resources and convincing community stakeholders to focus on a community strategy of collaboration and acting in the interest of “what’s best for the future of Daviess County.” According to Participant 9, “The success we’ve seen from the Work Ready initiative reinforces the importance of collective effort. Because of strong leadership in education, economic development, and city/county government, we’re able to put egos aside and work for the common good. The results we’re seeing, with the attraction of new industry, is a *direct* result of that collaborative spirit.” As one can see from the perspective of community leaders and their approach to economic development, big things can happen when a community works together.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to chronicle one community in northwest Kentucky and its successful pursuit of the Kentucky Work Ready Communities certification. This particular community, Daviess County, was the first community in Kentucky to earn the designation, which is sponsored by the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB). The goal of the certification program is to help communities attract new business and industry by demonstrating a strong, highly skilled, and sustainable workforce that is prepared for the employment needs of today and the future; thus, stimulating economic growth in the local community.

By examining a rural community like Daviess County, which has successfully achieved the Work Ready certification, and by sharing its story, community leaders from across Kentucky and beyond may find a pathway for successful implementation and can intelligibly decide whether or not embarking upon a pursuit of the Work Ready Communities certification is worth replicating. As a result of this study, recommendations can be formulated that specifically target best practices that may be unique for rural communities, given the difficulty of attracting industry to such areas. Finally, the study aimed to identify residual positive impacts of the community-led initiative with an assumption that such impacts do exist.

Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, in-person interviews were conducted to gather data for analysis. Ten out of a possible pool of twenty-five Daviess County community leaders, who were in some way involved in the Work Ready Communities initiative, were interviewed for the study. Upon completion of the in-person interviews, recordings were transcribed, coded utilizing multiple methods, and analyzed to identify major themes as they relate to Daviess County's success in earning the Work Ready Communities certification.

This chapter includes a summary of findings for the research study, which will serve as an opportunity to review the research findings from chapter 4 and relate them to the overall guiding questions for the research study. Following the presentation of findings, the researcher will expound upon the significance of the study in terms of relationship to other studies found in the literature, as well as its practical application. The chapter continues with an explanation of the research limitations that are present with this study and will conclude with recommendations for future, related research possibilities.

Summary of Findings

As previously reported, this qualitative case study was intended as an exposition, guiding the reader through the story of Daviess County, Kentucky and its successful achievement of the economic development designation as a Kentucky Work Ready Community. Further, the researcher intended to provide anecdotal evidence, by way of first-hand community stakeholder accounts, of how successful implementation of such an economic development strategy may assist other rural communities that are searching for opportunities to ignite and/or further stimulate their local economy and industry base.

From a pool of twenty-five potential subjects, nine Daviess County community stakeholders were selected to participate in the study. Each of the nine selected subjects represented a key stakeholder group and was actively involved in the effort. All nine subjects were very agreeable to participate and offer their perspectives and experiences as they relate to helping with important aspects of earning the WRC designation for Daviess County.

This study was conducted during the spring season of 2018, with face-to-face interviews serving as the principal means of collecting data. Participants were presented with an Informed

Consent document prior to scheduling interviews and were provided with a list of interview questions in advance of their scheduled interviews. During the face-to-face interviews, participants were once again provided with a copy of the interview questions for their reference. Upon completion of the interviews, transcripts were coded utilizing multiple methods in order to identify emergent themes. The researcher cross-referenced the multiple coding methods to verify the identified themes. These themes serve as the basis for responding to the research questions, which serve as the foundation of the study.

Research Question 1 seeks to answer the question: How has achieving the Work Ready Communities certification positively impacted economic development in the community? From the review of the literature in Chapter 2, other initiatives from across the country (Helphinstine, Helphinstine, & King, 2008; Rural Development Initiatives, 2016; United States Department of Agriculture, 2015; U.S. Economic Development Administration, 2015; Zekeri, 2013) suggest that the keys to economic stimulation in rural areas include a strong vision for the community strategy and growth objectives, ongoing collaboration and communication among community stakeholder groups, and a concerted effort to reimagine the approach to workforce development.

Theme I from the qualitative research – Success Emerges When a Community Comes Together – suggests that the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County has increased communication and collaboration among stakeholder groups. Participants 3, 7, 5, 2, 6, 1, and 4 all mentioned, in some form, the growth in collaboration that has resulted from Daviess County’s participation in and success in earning the community certification. Further, each of these participants opined that the success from this initiative has increased confidence and momentum for continued and future collaborations among community groups.

Theme II – A Collective Vision for Success is Vital – suggests the importance of developing a community vision for economic growth. Participants 8, 1, 3, 5, and 4 each mentioned either previous efforts or the initial planning stages of the Work Ready Communities initiative as milestone moments for increasing the probability of success for community-wide initiatives. As Participants 8, 1, 5, and 4 specifically noted, some form of vision-casting took place prior to publicizing the Work Ready initiative in the community. This opportunity to determine the end result prior to initiating the program was cited by these participants as the key component to achieving the WRC designation. As a result of the success that came from this approach, participants mentioned that a similar approach has been employed with additional community and economic development initiatives and has yielded positive results and stronger relations among community stakeholder groups.

Theme III - Collaborative Relationships Among Stakeholder Groups Open Doors – offers multiple perspectives to point toward a response to Research Question 1. First, the responses from almost all participants suggest growth in industry in Daviess County and the surrounding region as a direct result of achieving the Work Ready Communities designation. Participants 6, 1, 3, 7, 8, and 4) were able to point to multiple industries that have located or expanded in the area, at least partially as a result of the community's designation as a Work Ready Community. Examples of new or expanding industry cited by participants include Alorica, Incorporated (addition of over 800 new jobs), Alleris, Incorporated (expansion of existing industry that added over 250 new jobs), U.S. Bank (expansion of existing industry that added over 800 new jobs), and two new bourbon distilleries – Old Nelly Distillery and OZ Tyler's Distillery – which capitalize on the state's growing bourbon industry, location to necessary resources in the area, and the strong workforce that is now present in the area as a result of the WRC initiative.

An additional perspective offered by Theme III suggests a stronger Daviess County workforce development approach as a result of the Work Ready Communities initiative. The majority of participants (7, 3, 9, 1, 5, and 2) cited the development of the KY FAME (Kentucky Federation for Advanced Manufacturing) apprenticeship program, which was launched in Daviess, Hancock, and Ohio Counties within the last four years, as a strategy that evolved from the success of the Work Ready Communities initiative. Citing the need to continue to develop the future workforce to meet the everchanging needs of industry in northwestern Kentucky, Daviess County leaders collaborated with surrounding county leaders, public and post-secondary educators, and industry leaders on the development of KY FAME, which works closely with twenty-five area industries to train and establish apprenticeships to prepare highly skilled workers to move directly into jobs upon graduation. Further, participants specifically mentioned the increase in collaboration among the two local school systems and post-secondary education partners as a direct result of the WRC initiative. Multiple participants (7, 3, 9, 1, and 5) boasted about various collaborative projects and programs that have been developed through collaboration between these educational entities in order to provide increased opportunity for students and the future workforce. These include increased dual credit opportunities, apprenticeship opportunities at the high school level, opportunities to complete a college Associates degree by the time of high school graduation, shared opportunities across school system campuses, and more.

Research Question 2 seeks to answer the question: What perceptions exist among community stakeholders that indicate optimism and/or a perceived improvement in workforce development approaches as a result of the Work Ready Communities initiative? The review of the existing literature (Helphinstine, Helphinstine, & King, 2008; Rural Development Initiatives,

2016; United States Department of Agriculture, 2015; U.S. Economic Development Administration, 2015; Zekeri, 2013) suggests that employing a community-wide, collaborative approach to addressing workforce and economic development deficits yields a number of positive outcomes, including increased collaborative efforts, increases in attraction of industry, and increased feelings of community among the various institutions and leaders that are engaged in the collaborative efforts.

Likewise, the qualitative research, based upon participant responses, indicates the following perceptions that now exist among community stakeholders as a result of the WRC initiative in Daviess County: “Walls” preventing communication (or silos, to which it is often referred) are continuing to dissolve in the various institutions in the Daviess County community. Specific examples cited by Participants 1, 3, 9, 8, and 5) include collaborative educational and workforce development initiatives involving the K-12 public education systems, post-secondary institutions, and industry representatives; the economic development strategy employed by the Economic Development Corporation, which involves engaging representatives from as many community groups as possible in determining vision and strategy; and efforts made by Daviess County city/county government to engage stakeholder groups on initiatives like the Work Ready Communities initiative, as well as other community-strengthening efforts.

Second, participants in the study cite additional collaborative efforts that have been ventured as a result of the success and positive relationships that developed during the WRC initiative. Participants 4, 2, 6, 7, and 1 specifically mentioned community projects, as well as ongoing economic development and workforce development efforts that have developed over the last six years, including community enhancement and beautification projects, marketing and tourism strategies, maintenance of the Work Ready Communities certification, and more.

Finally, Participants 1, 2, 5, 8, and 9 shared examples of Daviess County's recognition at the state and national levels as being a leader in workforce development and in overall economic development approach. In various publications, including *Southern Business and Development Magazine*, Daviess County has been highlighted for its approach to workforce development and overall economic development strategy. For these community leaders, this type of recognition is a source of pride and provides optimism that they are working in the best interest of the community by engaging in this type of approach.

Interpretations

The purpose of this qualitative research study, in addition to chronicling the case of Daviess County, Kentucky and its successful endeavor to earn the designation as a Kentucky Work Ready Community, is to address the following research questions:

- Research Question 1 – How has achieving the Work Ready Communities certification positively impacted economic development in the community?
- Research Question 2 – What perceptions exist among community stakeholders that indicate optimism and/or a perceived improvement in workforce development approaches as a result of the Work Ready Communities initiative?

To effectively answer Research Question 1, one must examine the data, results, and compare with the existing literature. All participants in the data gathering process indicated a strong belief that the experience of working collaboratively with community stakeholders and earning the WRC certification has yielded positive results for Daviess County and the surrounding region. Many cited multiple examples of this belief, including increased opportunities for community collaboration on projects, new partnerships between education and

industry, attraction of new industry and expansion of existing industry in the area, and new and creative opportunities to strengthen workforce development.

Theme I specifically supports the notion that community collaboration can lead to positive economic outcomes. Participants expressed their viewpoint that the Work Ready Communities initiative encouraged community leaders from a variety of sectors to engage. While community collaboration on a smaller scale has been present for several years in Owensboro/Daviess County, this particular initiative brought more and varied leadership to the table around an issue that impacts all groups. The success of this collaborative effort has set the stage for additional collaborations among community leaders over the past several years, leading to new initiatives to address workforce development and economic development strategies.

Theme II also contributes to an affirmative response to Research Question 1. As several of the participants noted during the interview process, Daviess County leaders have discovered the importance of developing a vision for the outcome of an initiative before it is ever introduced to the community. They refer to this approach as “vision casting.” The original leaders of the Daviess County Work Ready Communities initiative (the Economic Development Corporation, the Mayor of Owensboro, and the individual selected as the Chair of the WRC Steering Committee) met initially to determine the best strategy for enlisting support and for determining the best possible outcome for the initiative. Once this group determined the vision and strategy, they invited leaders from other community sectors to learn about Work Ready Communities and the vision for how it could improve all aspects of the community. This approach immediately paid dividends, leading to engagement and collaboration and, ultimately, success of the initiative. Because of the success of this strategy, it paved the way for approaching future community-wide initiatives, including the development of collaborative efforts around workforce development

initiatives and community and economic marketing strategies to attract new business and industry.

Theme III likewise points toward a positive response to Research Question 1 by focusing on the responses of most subjects regarding new or expanded industry that has committed to the Daviess County region, including Alorica, Incorporated, Old Nelly's Distillery, OZ Tyler's Distillery, and the expansion of Allaris, Incorporated and U.S. Bank. Leaders in industry and Economic Development for the area cite the attainment of Work Ready status, the presence of a strong workforce, and a positive economic climate of the area as major factors in a variety of industry making the decision to locate and/or expand in the northwestern Kentucky region. For as many new industries that have moved to the Daviess County area over the past seven years, there are almost as many area industries that have shown their support and confidence in the region by expanding their operations and creating jobs for hundreds of citizens.

Upon review of the literature, previous examples of collaborative, community-wide approaches to economic development (ACT Work Ready Communities, 2011; McLean, 2014; Robinson, Lyson, & Christy, 2002; United States Department of Agriculture, 2015; U.S. Economic Development Administration, 2016; and Zekeri, 2013) all point toward similar positive outcomes when community leadership sets aside personal agendas and enters the collaborative decision-making process with other leaders in the community. While the levels of economic improvement among these studies are mixed, all have demonstrated substantial improvement in the ability to develop a collaborative approach to attracting industry, as well as an ability to retain new and expanding industry. In all of these documented cases, leaders point to the benefits of a community-wide collaborative approach in helping to realize improved

economic standing and creating conditions that are more attractive to prospective industry. These findings are consistent with those of the Daviess County Work Ready Community case.

As a result of the themes and findings of the study, combined with consistency with the existing literature, Research Question 1 can be answered with positive outcomes. The increase in communication and collaborative efforts among the education, business and industry, and city/county government sectors, the development of a community-wide vision to create conditions in the community that are favorable to new and existing industry, and the tangible growth in new and expanding industry and workforce development efforts all support the notion that there are clear, positive impacts on economic development efforts in the Daviess County community as a result of community engagement in the Work Ready Communities initiative.

Regarding Research Question 2, which relates to perceived optimism and improvement in workforce development as a result in the community's participation in the WRC initiative, one needs only to review Theme III from Chapter 4. Theme III, titled, "Collaborative Relationships Among Stakeholder Groups Open Doors," specifically addresses the positive outcomes that have emerged as a result of the WRC initiative in Daviess County.

Throughout the course of gathering data from the research participants, all nine subjects expressed optimism in the direction of the county's current economic development strategy. As a result of this strategy, of which the Work Ready Communities initiative is representative, each participant was able to point to multiple examples of new or expanded industrial operations that have located in the Daviess County area or surrounding region since 2012 (the year Daviess County earned the WRC certification). Further, participants representing industry, the Economic Development Corporation, and county government specified examples of new industry that came to Daviess County at least partially as a result of the county's Work Ready designation. Two of

these interview participants, who had insight on this subject, stated that industry representatives were impressed because they quickly realized Daviess County could provide a strong workforce and had a solid, sustainable economic development strategy in place.

Another sign that points to optimism in the current workforce development approach of the county was cited by several participants as a new approach to collaboration on the part of various community institutions. Participants mentioned commitment by county government to establish a scholarship program to support individuals who had left college without earning a degree, but left in good academic standing, to return to college and finish the degree. Further, nearly all participants cited the development of the Kentucky Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (KY FAME) as one of the single greatest outcomes of the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County.

During the vision casting process, while community stakeholders were attempting to answer the question, “What do we want for our community?”, discussion among some participants turned toward workforce development. This discussion eventually manifested itself in the emergence of the KY FAME program in Daviess County. KY FAME is a partnership between regional manufacturers and local K-12 and post-secondary education institutions to develop industrial training programs and apprenticeships. According to research participants, it has been a complete game-changer for workforce and economic development. Since the program was introduced in Daviess, Ohio, and Hancock Counties, KY FAME programs have spread to other regions of the state and now impact the majority of Kentucky’s counties (Kentucky FAME, n.d.). As a result of the economic development approach enlisted by community leaders, as well as the Economic Development Corporation’s commitment to workforce development, *Southern*

Business and Development Magazine recognized Daviess County, Kentucky as one of the “Best of the South” in economic development.

Reviewing the existing literature on the subject, one can find a consistent theme with similar economic development initiatives across the country (ACT Work Ready Communities, 2011; Green & Haynes, 2008; Helpstine, Helpstine, & King, 2008; McLean, 2014; Meeks, 2017; Roenker, 2016; U.S. Economic Development Administration, 2013 & 2015; Zekeri, 2013). In each situation where economic development initiatives were found to be successful and sustainable, community leaders demonstrated a strong commitment to workforce development initiatives. In communities and regions where leadership leveraged their strategies with industry recruitment tactics and infrastructure support, but failed to invest fully in workforce development initiatives, those efforts were rarely successful or sustainable (Flora & Flora, 2013; Green & Haynes, 2008; Jenkins & Boswell, 2002; Meeks, 2017; United States Department of Agriculture, 2016; Wojan, 2000; Zekeri, 2013). Fortunately, for Daviess County, one of the most important aspects of their economic development strategy, according to study participants, is the commitment to long-term, high quality investment in developing the workforce. As previously mentioned, this has been cited as one of the primary sources of confidence for prospective employers.

Much like Research Question 1, Research Question 2 is supported with affirmation from the convergent findings that exist in this case study, as well as in the existing literature. A solid foundation of any economic development initiative that hopes to realize long-term success is investment in workforce development. In the case of Daviess County, this commitment appears to be present, as does the satisfaction of community and industry leaders.

Conclusions Based on the Results

From a practical standpoint, the results of this research study can be applied in a variety of ways that can help to inform future researchers, as well as communities that are looking for economic development strategies to support a sagging economy and/or inadequate workforce. First, as was mentioned by multiple participants in this study, it is crucial to get the *right people* in place to lead an economic development initiative. It is not enough to just have people – it is necessary to have representative leadership from a variety of community institutions; moreover, identifying strong leaders with influence throughout the community is crucial to the success of such an initiative. Fortunately, for Daviess County, this was most certainly the case. The authors of *ACT Work Ready Communities* (2011) suggest the same. According to their research, one of the most important aspects of the WRC initiative is to have strong leadership, meaning someone to whom people will listen, trust, and follow.

Grant and Wallace (1994) and McLean (2014) share a similar viewpoint on the importance of effective leadership when contemplating a community-wide effort such as this. It cannot be discounted just how important it is to have the right leaders in place to establish credibility and trust. In the absence of strong leadership, McLean (2014) concludes that large-scale, community-wide initiatives such as introducing a new economic development strategy are much less likely to succeed. Strong leadership is necessary to build momentum, “sell” the vision, and keep the initiative moving forward toward the goal.

As part of the United States Department of Agriculture’s (2015) recommendations on building capacity and initiating a rural economic development program, effective leadership, along with representation from all community institutions, is at the top of the list for launching a

successful campaign. The research is clear: strong, representative leadership is likely the most important aspect of any large-scale community initiative; in this case, economic improvement.

Another conclusion that comes from this research study and is supported by previous research is the importance of developing a shared vision with the end in mind before launching the initiative. Almost all the participants in this research study credited the initial vision casting meeting as one of the key pieces leading to success of the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County. According to multiple participants, leaders selling the vision set a positive tone for the work of the initiative because engaged stakeholders had a strong sense of the end result, which allowed them to work backward in developing the overall strategy and supporting activities.

The importance of vision casting is supported by the work of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (n.d.) in its publication, *Rural Economic Area Partnership Program (REAP Zones)*. The author of this study, much like the participants in the Daviess County case study, emphasize the need for strong leadership and a clear vision to direct the work of economic development initiatives such as those suggested in the research. Without the vision for success to guide the work, the author suggests potential difficulty in building momentum and moving the initiative straight ahead, rather than on a winding path. Zekeri asserts much the same in his 2013 research on economic development efforts in rural areas. Borrowing a quote from Alvin Toffler, Zekeri states, “You’ve got to think about big things while you’re doing small things, so that all the small things go in the right direction” (p. 15). In essence, while there are a multitude of tasks to complete in the midst of an economic development initiative, one must first have a vision for success in order to see how all the smaller parts point to the end result.

Green and Haynes (2008), in their work, *Asset Building and Community Development*, demonstrate a similar viewpoint on visionary leadership as they provide recommendations for how a struggling community might approach an economic development initiative. In building upon the many key assets that are present in a community, a community-wide growth initiative, whether it be economic, social, or aesthetic, must first identify strong, visionary leadership to help establish the vision for the work ahead. Without a strong, shared vision for success, many initiatives will flounder under the weight of disorganization. In the case of Daviess County, community leaders were able to approach the Work Ready Communities initiative with strong leadership and the foresight to develop a vision for success prior to launching the work.

A third conclusion that can be drawn from the Daviess County case is the assertion that workforce development must be the foundation of any successful economic development initiative. Many of the participants in this study cited workforce development as the most important consideration in their economic strategy. While visionary leadership creates the greatest benefit for the stakeholders involved in the initiative, a strong, sustainable, highly skilled workforce is what is most important to employers. Since the goal of the economic development strategy is to attract new or expanding industry and retain existing industry, workforce development must be the most important consideration. As mentioned in the previous section (Interpretations), there were several workforce development initiatives launched by K-12 and post-secondary education institutions in the community, city/county government, and by the Economic Development Corporation. Workforce development was the cornerstone of the Work Ready initiative in the Daviess County community.

The developers of the Kentucky FAME literature (n.d.) agree with the Daviess County stakeholders in the belief that workforce development must be at the heart of any economic

development initiative. Considering that KY FAME's primary goal is workforce development, the author of the publication touts the importance and potential success of programs like KY FAME and other collaborative efforts to introduce manufacturing skill building and apprenticeship opportunities to prepare future workers for the demands of industry. Likewise, Green and Haynes (2008) also suggest the importance of creating opportunities for human capital to be maximized through a variety of workforce development initiatives. If a community's goal is to attract industry, Green and Haynes, along with Helphinstine, Helphinstine, and King (2008), claim that it is imperative for said community to establish training programs that demonstrate highly skilled workers are available now and will continue to be available by way of high level training programs whose leaders are in constant communication and collaboration with employers and industry leaders.

Limitations of the Study

While the researcher has confidence in the findings of this study, it is important, as with any research study, to note limitations. First, while Daviess County, Kentucky is considered by many in the northwestern region of the state to be a rural community, it does have economic and proximate advantages and conditions that may not be present in other rural communities across the state and in other areas of the country. As a result, it may not be possible to generalize the results of this study to all rural communities. For example, while Daviess County is constituted largely by agrarian farmland, it is anchored by the city of Owensboro, which ranks in the top ten largest cities in the state of Kentucky. This very likely would not be the case in some rural locations of the state. Daviess County is also located near a major waterway (the Ohio River) and in relatively close proximity to larger metropolitan cities, including Evansville, Indiana and Louisville, Kentucky. Even so, the conditions that were in place to increase the likelihood of

success for the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County could likely be replicated in other rural communities that do not have the stated advantages that are in place in Daviess County. According to the participants in this study, the people within the community is what made the greatest difference in the success of the initiative. This could prove to be true in other locations, as well.

A second possible limitation of the study is potential researcher bias. The researcher currently serves as the chair of the Work Ready Communities steering committee in another community in western Kentucky. Direct involvement of the researcher in the very same initiative could skew the results of the study as a result of bias; however, steps were taken to minimize researcher bias by focusing exclusively on participants' responses and the coding system, which utilized multiple methods to triangulate the data and identify themes, thus reducing subjectivity and bias.

Finally, a third potential limitation of the study may result from the number of participants that were included in the study. While there was a potential pool of 25 participants that played important roles in the success of the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County, there were only nine participants that were selected to participate in the study. Each of the nine participants played active roles in the initiative and were extremely knowledgeable about the process and overall experience. Future studies may wish to include a broader number of study participants to more fully capture the opinions of the entire community regarding the success of the Work Ready Communities initiative, or other selected initiative, and its impact on workforce development and on the community.

Recommendations for Further Research

As a result of the study and its findings, the following recommendations can be made for future related research:

- Considering the Kentucky Work Ready Communities initiative is still a relatively new effort (introduced in 2012), future researchers may wish to follow up with Kentucky communities that have successfully completed the certification program and reported initial economic development success to verify whether or not the reported success has continued via continuation of the Work Ready Communities certification and economic growth. There are a number of factors that contribute to economic success and decline. An interesting future study might focus its attention on the sustainability of economic growth in rural communities that employ economic development initiatives such as the Work Ready Communities certification program.
- For the purposes of future research, an individual who is interested in a related study of economic growth in rural communities may benefit from expanding the scope of interviews beyond participants who are directly involved in the work of the selected initiative. In this research study, nine participants from a pool of twenty-five possible stakeholders were selected. The perspectives offered by other stakeholder representatives may possibly yield additional insight and results of a similar study.
- The Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board is in the process of revamping the criteria of the Work Ready Communities certification program to include additional measures of workforce development and community engagement. Once the new criteria is in place and the updated certification program is introduced, a future researcher may choose to focus his or her study on whether or not communities that have previously earned the

Work Ready Communities certification are finding success in maintaining the certification with the introduction of the revised criteria, and whether or not the revised criteria is aiding communities in further attracting new or expanding business and industry.

The nature of this research study lends itself to a variety of avenues for future research consideration. While earning the Work Ready Communities certification is a distinct milestone of the certification program, it is only one step in assisting a community in strengthening the local economy through workforce development, attracting new or expanding business and industry, adapting to changes in the criteria and economic conditions, and encouraging a community to continue working together to sustain and grow the many community-related aspects of the program in order to maintain the designation.

P-20 Implications

With its emphasis on engaging leaders from a variety of disciplines and areas of expertise to address a community issue, the Work Ready Communities model is an ideal example of the P-20 concept in action. As the Daviess County WRC Steering Committee has demonstrated, the collective leadership of community-focused stakeholders can lead to positive outcomes and growth for a community. While community leaders demonstrated the strength of collective effort in the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County, their strategy is one that has exhibited success in several different county improvement initiatives over the last several years, whether they be economic development initiatives, marketing strategies, or lifestyle improvement efforts, leaders in Daviess County have utilized a community strategy that places an emphasis on engaging leaders, building strong professional relationships, committing to

collaboration, eliminating “silos,” and developing a clear vision for the end result before any of the actual work ever starts.

From a P-20 standpoint, communities or institutions that are faced with difficult challenges need look no further than to the results of the Daviess County WRC initiative. Like several other communities around Kentucky that have been successful in earning the Work Ready Communities certification, Daviess County has placed a premium on the collective expertise of its leaders, utilizing a strong vision of success and a focus on the good of the community. This approach has produced success for this community looking for an answer to economic stagnation. It has also provided a blueprint from which other communities can benefit.

While the P-20 movement has its roots in education, with supports for student education and career preparation from K-12 through post-secondary education and into the workforce, these same wraparound supports are proving effective in other societal domains – case in point: the Daviess County Work Ready Communities initiative. Through partnerships between K-12 and post-secondary institutions to develop dual credit opportunities, an early college program, and work study programs, opportunities have been put in place to better prepare students for the demands of employers. As a result of collaboration between city and county government and post-secondary institutions, opportunities have been created that will allow working age adults to return to school to complete unfinished degrees. The Economic Development Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, and business leaders have collaborated on recruitment and marketing campaigns to attract new business to the area; thus, stimulating the local economy. Collaboration between industry leaders, career and technical education representatives, the Economic Development Corporation, and county leaders has led to the development of skills-enhancing apprenticeship programs like KYFAME. The many examples of high quality, community

strengthening collaborations that have been in place for several years in Daviess County is a primary contributor to its economic turnaround, including the focus on workforce development, which is particularly pleasing to prospective employers. This effort bodes well for the P-20 model of community leadership, as well as in other realms.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study provides insight into the role economic development initiatives such as Kentucky's Work Ready Communities initiative play in assisting rural communities in strengthening the local workforce and attracting new or expanding industry. Using anecdotal evidence provided by first-hand participants in this successful initiative in Daviess County, the qualitative themes that emerged from the interview responses serve to provide affirmative responses to the research questions on which the study was designed.

The challenge for Daviess County, as is the case for most rural communities looking to attract and retain new and existing business and industry, is to continue fostering collaborative relationships among the various institutional leaders within the community, continue to place community interest above self-interest, and demonstrate a willingness and perseverance to respond to the ever-changing demands of a global economy. To date, Daviess County, Kentucky has found the winning formula to present its community as a viable option for industry and has provided a path to economic sustainability from which other struggling rural communities can benefit.

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Appendix A

Murray State University

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Application for Approval of Investigations Involving Human Participants

This form is the official documentation of the formal design or plan of a research activity submitted to the IRB for review. Failure to provide all required information will result in return of your application for correction prior to review. It is to be filled out on-line and then the appropriate parts are to be printed for submission. Do not submit pages that do not apply to your research protocol and do not submit your protocol answers as an attachment (the only attachments should be supporting documents). **NOTE: You must submit the signed form as a pdf document and the appropriate materials that support that request as editable *Word* documents to msu.irb@murraystate.edu.**

⊕ PART A

I. Project Title: <u>An Analysis of Success in Economic Development: The Case of Daviess County, Kentucky</u>	
Principal Investigator(s): <u>Tim Roy</u>	
Department: <u>College of Education and Human Services</u>	Telephone: <u>270-635-0254</u>
Campus Address: <u>N/A</u>	Email address: <u>tim.roy@hopkins.kyschools.us</u>
Status: <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Student <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify: <u> </u>)	
<i>If PI is an Undergraduate or Graduate Student, applications must be submitted by the faculty mentor and all IRB communications will be sent to the faculty mentor:</i>	
Faculty Mentor: <u>Dr. Brian Parr</u>	Telephone: <u>270-809-2966</u> Email address: <u>bparr@murraystate.edu</u>
Department: <u>Agriculture Science</u>	Campus Address: <u>212 Oakley Applied Science</u> <u>South, Murray, KY 42071</u>

Will any other university personnel or students be assisting with this data collection? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If yes, who are they and what position do they hold at the university? <u> </u>
Please check which is appropriate: <input type="checkbox"/> Class Project <input type="checkbox"/> Research Project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thesis (or Doctoral project)
If this research is for a thesis or senior project, who are the faculty members on your thesis or project committee? <u>Dr. Brian Parr, Dr. Kemaly Parr, Dr. Peter Weber, and Dr. Samir Patel</u>
Project Period (mm/dd/yyyy) From: <u>9/13/2017</u> To: <u>11/15/2017</u>

The designated project period must include all project activities involving humans, with the start date no earlier than the date of IRB approval. The IRB can approve a project for a maximum of 12 months. However, the IRB may decide that more frequent review is necessary. Protocols with project periods longer than 12 months or those that the IRB feels necessitate more frequent review will require a continuing review (use the Project Update and Closure form).	
Is a proposal for funding support being submitted? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	If yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Internal <input type="checkbox"/> External
Agency or Sponsor: <u> </u>	Deadline: <u> </u>
Will this protocol require review by another IRB? If yes, name of other IRB: <u> </u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Any additions or changes in procedures in the protocol will be submitted to the IRB for written approval prior to these changes being put into practice. Any problems connected with the use of humans once the project has begun must be brought to the attention of the IRB Coordinator. The principal investigator and his or her designee are responsible for retaining Informed Consent Documents in a secure location for a period of three years after the completion of the project or until a minor reaches one year past the age of majority, whichever is longer. Should the faculty investigator or sponsor leave the university before this time, s/he must notify the IRB and provide the exact location for the future storage of these materials.

ASSURANCE STATEMENT: I have read and understand Murray State University's *Procedures and Guidelines* for the Protection of Human Subjects and I agree: (1) the information provided herein does strictly apply to the proposed research; (2) to accept responsibility for the scientific and ethical conduct of this study; (3) to obtain IRB approval prior to revising or altering the research protocol or the approved Informed Consent form; and (4) to immediately report to the IRB any serious adverse reactions and/or unanticipated effects on subjects which occur as a result of this study. I certify that I will conduct my study in an ethical manner that complies with all relevant MSU policies and procedures.

This form is the official documentation of the formal design or plan of a research activity submitted to the IRB for review. Failure to provide all required information will result in return of your application for correction prior to review.

Principal Investigator

Date

Statement of Approval by Faculty Mentor (required for all students):

I have read and do confirm the accuracy of this application, and I accept responsibility for the conduct of this activity, the supervision of participants, and the maintenance of informed consent documentation as required by the IRB. I certify that my student(s) will conduct this study in an ethical manner that complies with all relevant MSU policies and procedures.

Faculty Mentor

Date

REQUIRED INFORMATION (Applies to all levels of review)

In order for the IRB to evaluate your application, the following required materials must be provided with this application. Protocols will be returned if incomplete or if documents are not sent in the correct format. Electronic file names should follow this format: [PI first initial & last name]_[Document type]_[version # (date for CITI training)]

Examples: jbaskin_application_v1.pdf, wsmith_interview consent_v3.doc, hmallory_CITI_012416.pdf

- YES NA A copy of all interview or survey questions, evaluation instruments (including standardized questionnaires), and data collection forms to be used (If copyright agreements forbid photocopying of a standardized instrument, include an original with a note requesting that it be returned to the investigator).
- YES NA Informed consent document(s), either a consent form or cover letter, or parental/guardian permission and minor assent document(s), if necessary.
- YES NA Letter of approval from cooperating institutions (includes gathering data at a site).
- YES NA Scripts of statements or questions to be read to subjects which should include the following information: participant time commitment, course credit procedures to be used, voluntary nature of the study and that subjects are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice from the investigator, how data will be handled - anonymous or confidential.
- YES NA A copy of any advertisement, recruitment letter, sign-up folder, etc. that will be used to obtain participants
- YES ON
FILE A copy of the required training certification (the IRB will not review any protocol until all principal investigators, faculty mentors, university personnel and others who will be assisting with the data collection have completed the required training and submitted a certificate or score to the IRB Coordinator)
- YES A pdf copy of the signed, completed *Application for Review* sent to the IRB via email at msu.irb@murraystate.edu
- YES An editable *Word* document copy of all attachments (surveys, consent documents, recruitment materials, data collection forms, etc.) sent to the IRB via email at msu.irb@murraystate.edu

This form is the official documentation of the formal design or plan of a research activity submitted to the IRB for review. Failure to provide all required information will result in return of your application for correction prior to review.

LEVEL OF REVIEW

Activities involving no more than minimal risk to participants and in which the only involvement of humans will be in one or more of the categories defined in Section 6.1 and 6.2 of the *Procedures and Guidelines* as Level 1 or Level 2 research will be reviewed by the IRB as a Level 1 or 2 application. "Minimal risk" means the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves from those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examination or tests (45 CFR 46.102 (I)). These categories do not apply to research involving prisoners, fetuses, pregnant women, or human in vitro fertilization. Activities involving those populations and/or more than minimal risk will be reviewed as a Level 3 application. The investigator is responsible for initially identifying the category he/she feels is appropriate.

For continuing activities, investigators should use the [Project Update and Closure](#) form.

After reading [Section 6](#) of the *MSU Procedures and Guidelines*, state the category that you feel best applies to your research project: (Level 1, 2, or 3) **Level 1**

Note: The final determination of the appropriate level of review will be made by the IRB Coordinator.

PART B

1. Does this study involve deception (i.e., withholding from or giving false or misleading information to subjects which would reasonably affect their decision of whether or not to participate)? YES NO
2. Will procedures cause any degree of physical or emotional discomfort greater than normally encountered in everyday life, risk of physical injury, invasion of privacy, threat to dignity, harassment, or otherwise present potential harm to subjects? YES NO
3. Other than on consent forms, will the subjects be identified (i.e., names, case identifiers, audio or video recordings, photographs, or other information gathered on people or institutions that would allow subjects to be identified) *and* could their participation in this research lead to personal harm to themselves or their reputation? YES NO
4. Are subjects from any of the categories listed below?
- a. Minors (less than 18 years of age) YES NO
- b. Prisoners or persons who are under criminal sanctions YES NO
- c. Persons with diminished mental capacity (e.g., mental retardation, neurological, psychiatric, or related disability) YES NO
- d. Persons in a residential program (e.g., hospital, developmental center, group home, etc.) YES NO
- e. Current clients of a human service program (e.g., counseling center, clinic, etc.) or clients who have **not** given permission for their unidentified clinical data to be used in research studies YES NO
- f. Pregnant women YES NO
- g. Traumatized, terminally ill or comatose patients YES NO

If your research falls into one of the categories listed under Level 1 review and if you answered NO to all parts of questions 1-4, complete Part C for Level 1 review.

If your research does not fall into one of the categories listed under Level 1 or you answered YES to any part of questions 1-4, complete Part D for Level 2 or 3 review.

Part C**Level 1 Review**

I. PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE: As part of its risk-benefit analysis, the IRB must have information on (a) the purpose of the research, (b) why the research is necessary, (c) what outcomes are expected from it (both general and specific), and (d) in what way those outcomes will add to or benefit generalizable knowledge. Your answer should clearly address each of those four questions and should avoid (or define) technical terminology/jargon as much as possible.

(a) The purpose of this study is to examine one western Kentucky community's approach to improving workforce and economic development utilizing the Work Ready Communities initiative. Ultimately, the outcome of the study aims to provide other struggling, rural communities with a successful model that may be adapted to local, unique circumstances. (b) The research is necessary because the economic standing of rural communities is continuing to decline. With business and industry continuing to outsource manufacturing, many rural communities are feeling the brunt of industry moving to larger cities or even to other countries. The study focuses on a rural Kentucky community that has successfully earned a workforce development certification that is sponsored by the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board. By studying this community's process and success, the aim is to inform other struggling, rural communities in their attempts to improve their economic standing. (c) The expected outcomes of the study are two-fold: 1. The study will report the success of the focus community in their work to strengthen workforce development and the economic viability of the community. 2. The results of the study will allow other rural communities to get a clear picture of one process that can be followed in order to strengthen workforce and economic development in their own community. (d) We are inundated with narrative underscoring the struggling American economy. While it touches nearly all parts of our country, rural communities and sections of the country are particularly impacted. With little tax base to stimulate or support growth, communities themselves must come up with ways to make themselves more marketable to business and industry. The community that is highlighted in this study was one of the first in the Commonwealth to initiate and earn the workforce development certification program known as the Work Ready Communities initiative. By highlighting how this certification has impacted economic development in this particular community, other communities may identify a blueprint for working to improve the economy of their county and/or region.

II. PARTICIPANT SELECTION:

- a) Does this research involve the use of existing data, documents, records, pathological or diagnostic specimens? YES NO
- b) Will participants be less than 18 years of age? YES NO NA
- c) Will participants be students at Murray State University? YES NO NA
- d) Will any participants be unable to speak, read or understand English? YES NO NA
- e) Will you be specifically recruiting members of any minority population? YES NO NA
- If yes, specify the population(s):

Describe how participants will be selected, enlisted, or recruited. Information about selection should include specifics about the subject group(s) (e.g. Participants will be selected based on their height/class attendance/random drawing from a list provided by the school district). You must attach a copy of any recruitment materials used in this study, including a copy of any verbal script, flyer, or email that will be used to invite people to be part of the study. These must be submitted via email with the protocol.

As part of the application process to initiate the Work Ready Communities initiative in a community, the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board requires active participation by specific

stakeholder groups from the community. This includes city/county government, K-12 and postsecondary education representatives, representatives from local economic development bodies, and representatives from business and industry. KWIB also recommends other community stakeholders that should be invited to participating, including local media, adult education coordinators, concerned citizens, and more. Between the required and recommended stakeholders, there is the potential for a minimum of 25-30 stakeholders becoming involved in the initiative; however, there will typically be more than this minimum number, considering the involvement of committees to inform the Work Ready Communities Steering Committee. Participants for this study will be recruited from this stakeholder pool by recruitment letter. The letter will be followed up with an email or phone call to each.

III. PROCEDURES/METHODS:

Answer the following questions to provide an explanation of why this research needs to be conducted using the specific methodology, participants, and procedures proposed in this protocol:

- a. What is your research question or hypothesis?

For this study, there are 2 research questions: 1. How has achieving the Work Ready Communities certification positively impacted economic development in the community? 2. What perceptions exist among community stakeholders that indicate optimism and/or a perceived improvement in workforce development approaches as a result of the Work Ready initiative?

- b. Describe the specific procedures and methodology that will be used in the study, including the frequency, duration and location of each procedure and the materials that support that methodology.

To gather data for the study, I will utilize face-to-face interviews with 8-10 community stakeholders purposefully selected from the county's identified stakeholder pool. While there is a potential subject pool of 30 or more individuals, the initial 8-10 that will be invited will fill community roles that are specified as "required" in the Work Ready Community application. This includes, but is not limited to: elected officials from city and county government, heads of local economic development groups, local school superintendent(s) and/or principals, community college and university president(s), adult education representatives, Area Technology Center director(s), a local Workforce Development representative, business and industry representatives, and representative(s) from the local Chamber of Commerce. Most likely, the individuals that are a part of these community stakeholder groups will have the most intimate knowledge of the program in their community and will have been directly involved in the application process. If I am unable to identify 8-10 individuals from this initial group who are willing to participate in the interviews for the study, I will expand my recruitment to others that are identified in the Work Ready Communities application as "suggested" community stakeholders. Subjects will have received an informed consent form to preview and sign and this form will be read to them verbally prior to beginning the interview. The subjects will be provided a copy of the interview questions just before the beginning of the interview, as well. Interviews are anticipated to last between 30 and 45 minutes in duration and subjects are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without consequence. If a subject chooses to withdraw, he or she will be informed that his or her responses up to that point will not be included in any part of the study. Interviews will take place in a location that is convenient for the subjects. Working with the subjects, I will identify a location that is private and secure. One such location is an interior conference room in the local Chamber of Commerce office. This location has no windows and is located away from the traffic of the office. Office staff of the Chamber of Commerce has assured

me that this conference room is often used to meetings and discussions that are of a private, confidential nature. If interviews are to take place at any other location, I will take the steps necessary to ensure that a similar type of confidential interview space is available and utilized. Audio recording will be utilized during the interviews. Subjects will be informed of this and will have an opportunity to decline being audio recorded. Upon completion of interviews, I will transcribe individual participant responses and provide a copy of these questions and responses to each participant to verify for accuracy. Following accuracy verification, all interview responses will go through a coding process, utilizing an online program to identify themes (Atlas TI, for example).

- c. Describe any compensation that participants will receive in return for their participation.

Participants will receive no compensation for their participation in this study.

IV. INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS: Describe the informed consent process and attach a copy of all consent and/or assent documents. The informed consent document is NOT the process. It is the evidence that shows that your subjects have been given the information that they need to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in your research project. You must be explicit. You must give a step-by-step description of how you intend to inform your subjects of the details of their involvement in your research activity (i.e., you must say who gives this information, who they give it to, how they transmit this information, and when it is given). It is the principal investigator's responsibility to ensure that the consent and/or assent documents are written at a level that can be easily understood by the subject population.

Prior to initiating interviews for data-gathering, I will make contact with my subject pool via email. This introductory email will explain the nature and purpose of the study and will request the potential subject's cooperation through participation in the interview. A copy of the Informed Consent form will be included. The subject will be asked to read and sign the document and either mail or scan and email a signed copy of the form directly to me. Upon receiving an ample number of signed consent forms, I will contact the subjects via email or phone to schedule interviews. Prior to beginning each interview, I will read the Informed Consent document aloud with each subject to make sure he or she fully understands all that is being asked of him or her, as well as allow the subject to seek additional clarification and/or withdraw from the study, if he or she so chooses. Upon agreement to continue with the interview, I will then hand a copy of the interview questions to the subject to review. If he or she has any questions regarding the content of the interview, we will discuss and clarify before the interview begins.

V. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY: Describe how participants' privacy will be maintained and confidentiality be guaranteed, including (a) how long confidential documents and information will be retained after the end of the study, (b) the specific building address where they will be retained, and (c) what will be done with the materials at the end of the retention time. (Federal regulations require that these materials be retained for at least three years after the study is closed.) If this study involves using a sign-up folder for recruitment of participants, explain how this document will be handled when the recruitment is finished (will it be kept with the confidential study materials, shredded, etc.).

Throughout the course of gathering data for the study, participants' privacy and confidentiality will be guaranteed. (a) Interview responses from participants will be retained for a minimum of 3 years, as required, upon completion of the study. (b) All records, including copies of affirmative emails and interview transcripts, from (a) will be securely stored at Murray State University. I will work with my research professor to identify the most appropriate on-campus location for storage of all records related to my study. In addition, a copy of research data will be stored on my

laptop computer in such a way that will only be accessible by me. All files will require a password to access and this password will also be kept in a secure location. As part of my process for ensuring confidentiality, each participant will be given a pseudonym by which he or she will be referred in all documents, as well as the final report. Each participant's pseudonym will be used as I record information and data so that, if discovered by anyone without a vested interest in the study, the identities of participants will not be compromised. Only my research professor, Dr. Brian Parr, and I will have access to a separate file that identifies participants by their pseudonyms. At the end of the 3-year retention period, all documents will be shredded and burned.

VI. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST and/or PROBLEMS OF UNDUE INFLUENCE:

Describe any possible issues about which the IRB should be aware concerning these matters.

- a. During the project period, will any of your subjects include students enrolled in classes taught by you or your faculty mentor? Yes No

If "Yes," please answer the following questions. If "No," please go to section 'b.'

1. During the project period, is participation in research a course requirement for any courses taught by you or your faculty mentor? Yes No

- 1a. If *yes*, is there an equitable alternative available for students to complete the requirement other than by participating in research studies? Yes No

If the answer to question 1a above is *no* (i.e., there is no equitable alternative to complete the course requirement), then this research cannot use any of the students in any of your or your faculty mentor's classes that have a research participation requirement. Explain how you will ensure that students in those classes do not participate in this research:

If the answer to question 1a is *yes* (i.e., there is an equitable alternative to complete the course requirement), describe the equitable alternative:

2. During the project period, will you or the faculty mentor offer extra credit to any of the students in your or your faculty mentor's classes in exchange for participation in this research study? Yes No

- 2a. If *yes*, is there an equitable alternative available to get extra credit for students who choose not to participate in the study?

Yes No

If the answer to 2a is *no* (i.e., there is no equitable alternative to get extra credit), then the research cannot use as subjects any of the students in your or your faculty mentor's classes where extra credit is offered for research participation. Explain how you will ensure that students in those classes do not participate in this research:

If the answer to 2a is *yes*, (i.e., there is an equitable alternative available to receive extra credit) describe the equitable alternative:

b. Are you using people with whom you otherwise interact in a work environment? This includes specifically targeting classmates if the PI is a student.

Yes No

c. If you plan to conduct research at an off-campus site, are you also employed at that site?

Yes No Not applicable

d. Do any members of the subject population work for you or any member of your family?

Yes No

e. Do you have any financial interest in the outcome of this research?

Yes No

f. Are you using family members or friends in your research?

Yes No

If you answered *yes* to b, c, d, e or f or if you have another conflict of interest or problem of undue influence, you must describe how you will handle the situation so that the rights of the subject population will be protected.

-
- Copy only the pages of the forms that apply to your research (i.e., Parts A, B, and C for Level 1).
 - For Level 1, submit a signed *pdf* copy of the protocol approval form and an editable *Word* file of all supporting materials (cover letter, consent form, surveys, recruitment fliers, data collection instrument, etc.) to the IRB via email at msu.irb@murraystate.edu.

Part D
Level 2 or 3 Review

In the spaces below, provide complete answers to the following questions. In order to evaluate and estimate possible risks and conduct an accurate risk-benefit analysis, the IRB must have sufficient information in non-technical language about why the research is needed and what will happen to participants. Assurance from the investigator, no matter how strong, will not substitute for a description of the transactions between investigator and participant.

I. PROJECT INTRODUCTION/LITERATURE REVIEW: In non-technical language, provide a summary of the purpose of the proposed research including a brief review of the relevant literature (This should include appropriate citations and references). This summary/literature review should be no more than two pages.

II. PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE: As part of its risk-benefit analysis, the IRB must have information on (a) the purpose of the research, (b) why the research is necessary, (c) what outcomes are expected from it (both general and specific), and (d) in what way those outcomes will add to or benefit generalizable knowledge. Your answer should clearly address each of those four questions and should avoid (or define) technical terminology/jargon as much as possible.

III. PARTICIPANT SELECTION:

Will participants be less than 18 years of age? YES NO

Age range of participants: From: _____ To: _____
(NOTE: if there is no required upper limit, simply state NO UPPER LIMIT.)

Will participants be students at Murray State University? YES NO

Minimum number of participants needed: _____

Gender: Male Female Both

If only male or only female, provide justification: _____

Will any participants be unable to speak, read or understand English? YES NO

If yes, please explain: _____

Will you be specifically recruiting members of any minority population? YES NO

If yes, specify the population(s): _____

Are you specifically recruiting members of a vulnerable population in this research? YES NO

If yes, to which vulnerable population(s) do they belong? (check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> cognitively impaired persons | <input type="checkbox"/> elderly/aged persons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> minor children | <input type="checkbox"/> pregnant women |
| <input type="checkbox"/> prisoners | <input type="checkbox"/> terminally ill patients |
| <input type="checkbox"/> traumatized or comatose patients | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify): _____ |

Describe how participants will be selected, enlisted, or recruited. Information about selection should include specifics about the subject group(s) (e.g. Participants will be selected based on their height/class attendance/random drawing from a list provided by the school district). You must attach a copy of any recruitment materials used in this study, including a copy of any verbal script, flyer, or email that will be used to invite people to be part of the study. These must be submitted via email with the protocol.

IV. PROCEDURES/METHODS:

Provide an explanation of why this research needs to be conducted using the specific methodology, participants, and procedures proposed in this protocol:

- a. What is your research question or hypothesis?

- b. Describe the specific procedures and methodology that will be used in the study, including the frequency, duration and location of each procedure and the materials that support that methodology.

- c. Describe the materials that will be used in this study and justify why you are using these particular materials including why these materials are appropriate for this methodology and this project.

- d. Describe the reason for the choice of participants, including why the sample population and sample size are appropriate for this study.

- e. Describe any compensation that participants will receive in return for their participation.

- f. Provide information on where and for how long you will retain the data collected in the study (Generally, data that support the results of the study must be retained for at least three years after the end date of the study.)

- g. Describe how the information obtained in the study will be evaluated, including the specific statistical and/or analytical procedures that will be used to evaluate the data.

- V. INVESTIGATOR QUALIFICATIONS:** Provide a description of the capabilities of the investigator(s) and (if applicable), the faculty mentor(s) as they apply to this specific research.



- VI. INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS:** Describe the informed consent process and attach a copy of all consent and/or assent documents. The informed consent document is NOT the process. It is the evidence that shows that your subjects have been given the information that they need to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in your research project. You must be explicit. You must give a step-by-step description of how you intend to inform your subjects of the details of their involvement in your research activity (i.e., you must say who gives this information, who they give it to, how they transmit this information, and when it is given). It is the principal investigator's responsibility to ensure that the consent and/or assent documents are written at a level that can be easily understood by the subject population.



- VII. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY:** Describe how participants' privacy will be maintained and confidentiality be guaranteed, including (a) how long confidential documents and information will be retained after the end of the study, (b) the specific building address where they will be retained, and (c) what will be done with the materials at the end of the retention time. (Federal regulations require that these materials be retained for at least three years after the study is closed.) If this study involves using a sign-up folder for recruitment of participants, explain how this document will be handled when the recruitment is finished (will it be kept with the confidential study materials, shredded, etc.).



- VIII. RISKS:** Describe all known and anticipated risks and discomforts to the participants including side effects, psychological or emotional risks, academic risks, social risks, economic risks, etc. If there is any outcome of the choice to participate or to continue to participate in the research that could affect a student's academic success in a class, then the IRB must be aware of this.



- IX. BENEFITS:** Describe any direct anticipated benefits to participants. If there are no direct benefits, describe any general benefits to be gained from the conduct of this research. Also, describe the overall importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result from this research.



- X. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST and/or PROBLEMS OF UNDUE INFLUENCE:**
Describe any possible issues about which the IRB should be aware concerning these matters.

- a. During the project period, will any of your subjects include students enrolled in classes taught by you or your faculty mentor? Yes No

If "Yes," please answer the following questions. If "No," please go to section 'b.'

1. During the project period, is participation in research a course requirement for any courses

taught by you or your faculty mentor? Yes No

1a. If *yes*, is there an equitable alternative available for students to complete the requirement other than by participating in research studies? Yes No

If the answer to question 1a above is *no* (i.e., there is no equitable alternative to complete the course requirement), then this research cannot use any of the students in any of your or your faculty mentor's classes that have a research participation requirement. Explain how you will ensure that students in those classes do not participate in this research:

If the answer to question 1a is *yes* (i.e., there is an equitable alternative to complete the course requirement), describe the equitable alternative:

2. During the project period, will you or the faculty mentor offer extra credit to any of the students in your or your faculty mentor's classes in exchange for participation in this research study? Yes No

2a. If *yes*, is there an equitable alternative available to get extra credit for students who choose not to participate in the study? Yes No

If the answer to 2a is *no* (i.e., there is no equitable alternative to get extra credit), then the research cannot use as subjects any of the students in your or your faculty mentor's classes where extra credit is offered for research participation. Explain how you will ensure that students in those classes do not participate in this research:

If the answer to 2a is *yes*, (i.e., there is an equitable alternative available to receive extra credit) describe the equitable alternative:

b. Are you using people with whom you otherwise interact in a work environment? This includes specifically targeting classmates if the PI is a student. Yes No

c. If you plan to conduct research at an off-campus site, are you also employed at that site? Yes No Not applicable

d. Do any members of the subject population work for you or any member of your family? Yes No

e. Do you have any financial interest in the outcome of this research? Yes No

f. Are you using family members or friends in your research?

Yes No

If you answered *yes* to b, c, d, e or f or if you have another conflict of interest or problem of undue influence, you must describe how you will handle the situation so that the rights of the subject population will be protected.

-
- Copy only the pages of the forms that apply to your research (i.e., Parts A, B, and D for Level 2 and 3).
 - Submit a signed *pdf* copy of the protocol approval form and an editable *Word* file of all supporting materials (cover letter, consent form, surveys, recruitment fliers, data collection instrument, etc.) to the IRB via email at msu.irb@murraystate.edu.

Appendix B

Research Introduction and Request Letter

September 18, 2017

Dear Daviess County Work Ready Community Stakeholder:

My name is Tim Roy and I am currently a student in the Murray State University P-20 doctoral program. The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in an interview for a research project that aims to examine your community's approach to improving its workforce and economic development via the Work Ready Communities initiative. Ultimately, the aim of the study is to highlight the success of your county's initiative while also providing other rural, struggling communities with a successful model that may be adapted to local, unique circumstances.

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to narrow my focus to community stakeholders who were involved in the Work Ready Communities initiative in Daviess County. At some point in the next few weeks, I would like to conduct face-to-face interviews with those stakeholders who agree to participate. The interviews will likely be recorded; however, at no time will participant names or individual identities be used in my research reporting. Anonymity of research participants is strongly respected and valued by me, and I will take steps that are necessary to protect your identity. If you choose to participate in my study, I will gladly provide you with a final copy of my research findings.

Most likely, participant interviews will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes each and participants are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and for any reason without penalty or prejudice. If a participant chooses to withdraw from the interview and study, his or her responses to interview questions will not be included in any part of the study. Interview subjects will not be compensated for their participation in the study.

I sincerely hope that you will consider participating in this important study. My ultimate goal, as previously stated, is to provide other communities with hope for strengthening their workforce and economic development initiatives by following or adapting your community's blueprint.

Soon, I will contact you via telephone or email to confirm your interest in being interviewed for this study. In the meantime, please feel welcomed to contact me as specified below with any questions you may have. I will be happy to discuss my study with you.

Sincerely,

Tim Roy
P-20 Doctoral Student, Murray State University
Email: tim.roy@hopkins.kyschools.us
Telephone: (270) 635-0254 (cell phone)

Appendix C

Informed Consent Document for Research

Principal Investigator: Tim Roy

Date: September 18, 2017

Study Title: An Analysis of Success in Economic Development: The Case of Daviess County, Kentucky

This informed consent document applies to adults only.

Name of participant: _____

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation. Please read this form carefully and feel welcomed to ask any questions you may have about the study and the information provided below. You will have an opportunity to ask questions and the primary investigator will take steps necessary to answer them to your satisfaction. You will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is examine one western Kentucky community's approach to improving workforce and economic development utilizing the Work Ready Communities initiative. Ultimately, the outcome of the study aims to provide other struggling, rural communities with a successful model that may be adapted to local, unique circumstances.
2. **What You Will Be Asked to Do:** You will be asked to participate in an interview that will last approximately 30 to 40 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked to respond to questions related to your experience and participation in the Work Ready Communities initiative in your community.

_____ Agree to voice recording _____ Disagree to voice recording

3. **Expected Costs:** There are no costs for participation.
4. **Risks of Participation:** The risks of participating are minimal. Participants are not expected to experience physical nor emotional trauma during the course of this study. Participants will participate in an interview for approximately 30 to 40 minutes.
5. **Benefits of Participation:** The results of the interviews and findings of the study may help other communities across the state and beyond to identify opportunities to improve the economic and workforce standing of their own community/region.
6. **Compensation:** Participants will receive no compensation for their participation in the interview.

- 7. Voluntary Participation: Participation is strictly voluntary. Participants are able to discontinue their participation at any time without consequence. Participants that do not complete the entirety of the interview will not have their answers utilized in the study or subsequent report.
- 8. Confidentiality: The identity of interview subjects is not an important aspect of the study and will not be reported in the findings; however, the principal investigator will take steps to maintain the confidentiality of all participants throughout the interview process.
- 9. Whom to Contact: You may contact the following individuals with any further questions regarding the study or your participation:

Research Investigator: Tim Roy tim.roy@hopkins.kyschools.us
 Research Professor: Dr. Brian Parr bparr@murraystate.edu

10. Interview Subject Acknowledgement:

I have read this informed consent document and the material contained in it has been explained to me verbally. All my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study under the conditions explained above. I also acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form for my records:

Date

Signature of Interview Subject

Printed Name of Interview Subject

Date

Signature of Research Investigator

Printed Name of Research Investigator

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Name of Subject: _____

1. Please describe your role in the Work Ready initiative in your community.
2. From your perspective, why and how did the community become involved in the Work Ready certification program?
3. In your opinion, was this truly a community-wide initiative? If so, how did that happen? If not, what prevented that from happening?
4. As a result of the Work Ready initiative, what is now occurring in the community in terms of workforce development that was not occurring previously?
5. As a result of this experience, has your community been successful in attracting new industry? If so, please site some examples.
6. If possible, please describe 2-3 positive outcomes for your community as a result of its participation in the Work Ready certification initiative.
7. What would be your top 2-3 suggestions or pieces of advice for a community that is considering initiating the Work Ready certification program?