



Over 5,000 people attended Incourage's 2015 Community Picnic to celebrate local assets. Photo credit: Tim Habeck, resident of Wisconsin Rapids.

Incourage Community Enterprises

connecting capitals, testing models, leveraging resources and sharing lessons

Incourage is a community foundation based in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, that has evolved from a traditional grantmaker into an organization that is unlocking and connecting all forms of capital to create a community that works well for all. Over the course of two decades, Incourage has developed a holistic approach that is **resident-centered, values-led and place-based**. At its core, Incourage's work centers on human development, promoting values of **equity, opportunity and shared stewardship** to foster conditions in which all residents can benefit, participate and thrive.

Toward a Community that Works Well for All People

For more than a century, Wisconsin Rapids and its surrounding towns and villages had a bustling economy based on the paper industry. As the paper industry contracted in the late 1990's, the region experienced a major economic restructuring resulting in a loss of approximately 40% of jobs. When Incourage set out to help address resulting needs, it found both an economic emergency and community-wide crisis of culture and identity. For decades, the region and its residents had relied on the operations and leadership of one major company, in an industry dependent upon natural resource extraction. New approaches to resource allocation and ways of working were required to create a lasting basis for an economically thriving, environmental sustainable and inclusive community. To foster the change that would translate into improved lives for all residents, a fundamental shift in community culture was required. New norms were needed, including openness to new ideas and entrepreneurial possibilities, redefined leadership and decision-making processes, and a shift in mindset from "I cannot" to "I can" to "We can do better."

Over the past decade, Incourage has made substantial investments to accelerate needed change, including the Community Progress Initiative, a regional development partnership with the Wisconsin Rapids Chamber of Commerce launched in 2004 with support from the Ford Foundation, and Workforce Central, a community-wide approach to workforce development in advanced manufacturing launched by Incourage following its successful advocacy to make Wisconsin Rapids the National Fund for Workforce Solutions' first rural site. The demonstrated effectiveness of Workforce Central led to the emergence in 2014 of the first comprehensive effort seeded by Incourage and broadly led by cross sector leaders to collaborate and coordinate economic development investments using an expanded definition of 'region'. In a multi-year partnership with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Incourage continues to invest in a strengthened regional information ecosystem to grow resident engagement, stimulate entrepreneurial activity and support new cross-sector collaborations. See *Incourage Milestones*.

Accelerating Change through a Holistic, Adaptive Approach

Through its work, Incourage has acquired a deep, practice-proven understanding of the dynamics of place-based change. As the history of our region amply demonstrates, rigid one-dimensional efforts led by the few discourage participation and hamper innovation. Instead, regional initiatives must include the voices of people they are designed to benefit and be as dynamic as the contexts they are designed to change. Similarly, our experience shows that investment in narrow programmatic silos constrains broader collaboration and limits overall impact. For this reason, Incourage invests in holistic strategies that are informed and led by residents, and that promote collaboration between organizations, as the only way to create lasting, transformational results.

Incourage understands that all forms of capital in a community, as well as within individual institutions including our own, are required to create this level of transformation. **By bringing human, intellectual and financial capital together with moral, social and reputational capital, Incourage is advancing a resident-centered plan for meaningful community change.** See *Incourage Capitals*.

Incourage has a unique understanding of how to unlock and connect each of these capitals using key levers that include resident engagement, targeted research and data-gathering, resident capability- and capacity-building, impact investing, policy advocacy, and public-private-philanthropic partnerships. See details on Incourage's strategy and anticipated outcomes in the *Strategy Map*. Work to mobilize all capitals and unleash the potential of these key levers is ongoing but will not happen overnight. Incourage has committed to invest thoughtfully and for the long term to yield sustained results and maximum impact.

Incourage is currently focused on assembling the financing to break ground on the **Tribune**, the community's capstone investment (see sidebar). On parallel paths, Incourage is cultivating and refining opportunities within a model regional impact investing portfolio, and is planning for capital solicitation beginning in late 2015. For more details, see *Incourage Case Statement*.

Forging ahead: values led, connected capitals investing

Incourage is working with local, regional and national partners on multiple fronts to establish a strong and inclusive economy, able to deliver quality jobs and a community that is healthy, equitable and open to change. Incourage's connected capitals approach guides investment in promising organizations, sectors, and regional projects. A recent example is **Blueprints** – a USDA supported training and coaching curriculum in contemporary community economic development practices for regional development professionals and key institutional partners designed to accelerate community change.

Co-learning for increased impact

Incourage's values-led, resident-centered strategy to align 100% of its existing assets with mission is attracting the attention of funders and others who want to learn how a decade of experience, sustained engagement and leading thinking about inclusive economic development and sustainable communities can be applied successfully in place. Incourage has already built, and will continue to cultivate, lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with values-aligned partners in order to accelerate positive change and increase impact within our region.

Please join us in unlocking the full potential of place-based philanthropy.

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Tribune: A Community Accelerator

In 2012, Incourage invested in its holistic strategy for accelerating community change by purchasing the former *Daily Tribune* headquarters on the banks of the Wisconsin River in downtown Wisconsin Rapids. Incourage is now leading a \$14 million redevelopment of the Tribune to realize a resident-led design that includes the area's first LEED building, a microbrewery, cafe, culinary kitchen incubator, maker space, retail shop, and recreational rentals with community space for meetings, trainings, and youth activities. Its outdoor spaces will be used for outdoor dining, public gatherings and recreational activities along the scenic Wisconsin River.

The Tribune will serve as a "community accelerator," a term Incourage uses to describe this social enterprise that is more than a real estate project. As a hub of entrepreneurial activity and technical training located in an attractive downtown destination, the Tribune will help accelerate economic growth and development. With its focus on environmental sustainability, the Tribune will advance the community's understanding of the connection between sustainability and future economic prosperity. Through a culture that supports learning and builds community connections, the Tribune will foster creativity, new thinking, and the ability to take risks and "fail forward" - essential attributes of a community that is open to change and shaping a strong and inclusive local economy. For more information, see tribunebuilding.org.

