



Co-Creating Sustainable Communities

What if our region became a *leading example* of a **sustainable community**?

Our community has what it takes to make this future possible.

Business-as-usual is not working: While we are proud of our successes and honored by the trust we have built with so many residents of our region, Incourage believes that if our current strategies were working at the pace required, we would not be experiencing a worsening economic reality in the South Wood County area. Incourage is choosing not to ignore what the data is making painfully clear: almost 20 years of declining household income with a simultaneous rise in inequality. Our current approaches to creating positive change in our community are not sufficient. We can—and *must*—do better.

We believe that our community holds the solutions: And increasingly, so do they: In our latest Community Survey, 73% of residents said that they are ready for change. Incourage has learned that when we ask residents to share their ideas, insights, and leadership, innovative solutions emerge. Visionary solutions come from diverse points of view. We need the insights of people across all walks of life in our community to identify solutions that will create opportunity for all.

For this reason, Incourage is convening a diverse circle of residents to form the **Sustainable Communities Working Group**. This group will engage residents across our community to *co-create a blueprint* for the sustainable community that our region can become.

Co-creating a transformative blueprint: What do we mean by co-creation? Going beyond traditional “community engagement” or simple check-the-box participation, co-creation is when many people come together to brainstorm, build and decide together—taking initiative and sharing ownership for the final result. In recent years, research has shown that co-creative processes have a unique potential to create breakthrough solutions—to generate bold new ways forward that make a real difference for the challenges facing our communities. Incourage is leading a co-creative process that will embody best practices for creating breakout innovation. We are building upon our own lessons learned over the past two decades of engaging residents in our community to build and lead our future.

We are also collaborating with experts in co-creation for breakout innovation, Jess Rimington and Joanna Cea, visiting scholars at Stanford University’s Global Projects Center, whose work and research focuses on co-creative processes for economic transformation. In their research, Cea and Rimington have identified five practices that are the hallmark of co-creative processes that lead to transformative outcomes for the communities involved. Their findings were featured as a cover story of the magazine *Stanford Social Innovation Review* in 2017: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/creating_breakout_innovation. Cea and Rimington have been following Incourage’s work since 2015 and they are honored to apply their findings to support Incourage and the Sustainable Communities Working Group to generate a blueprint that makes a powerful difference for our community’s future.



We will turn the blueprint into real-world action: Incourage is committed to ensuring that this endeavor is not merely a thought exercise that results in nothing more than words on paper. We will turn the blueprint into real-world action.

- **New resources:** Alongside the Sustainable Communities Working Group, we are also convening a **Sustainable Communities Funding Circle** to help design a groundbreaking new funding model designed specifically to resource the ideas and aspirations of the blueprint. The Sustainable Communities Funding Circle will bring together leading funder and investment practitioners from across the U.S., with residents of our communities who know what it takes to create new businesses, initiatives and programs in our community. In collaboration with the Sustainable Communities Working Group, this Funding Circle will co-create recommendations for how Incourage can go beyond business-as-usual for community foundations in how we fund and support our residents. Incourage is ready to be bold in offering new funding possibilities specifically designed to resource this blueprint created by our community--blending grant, investment and other forms of capital and support, to bring this blueprint to life.
- **New thinking:** The blueprint will also inform the priorities and direction for the newly announced **Partnership for Sustainable Communities** of Incourage and University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, a center for thought-leadership and action on sustainable communities that is the first of its kind in the state.
- **A new Incourage:** Incourage is initiating an internal change process to fully embrace its origins as a community stewardship organization created by and for the people; and to realize the true nature of philanthropy, which is love of humanity. We are ready to explore and embrace profound change.

We envision that the blueprint will apply not only to how we serve residents in our community, but also to how we engage key actors that influence our economic reality--including corporations that operate in our community. We will connect the content of the blueprint with our ongoing efforts for corporate responsibility with corporations and stakeholders.

Join us!

For more information, contact:

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If you can see yourself as a member of the Sustainable Communities Working Group, we would be honored to have you consider joining.