

**Community Resilience Guild - Fellows Program:
Connecting GC Grad Talent with Local Need & Opportunity
-- Draft Concept Note --**

Purpose:

The Fellows Program seeks to connect high achieving graduates from Goshen College to the work of local initiatives and organizations in order to support the individual and collective impact of this work in and for the community. This program will offer selected Fellows:

- 1) An opportunity to partner with and offer their time, knowledge, and skills to local initiatives;
- 2) A structured learning environment with respected professionals to coach and mentor them in their work to ensure quality in services provided and to maximize their own learning through critical reflection; and
- 3) A modest stipend to cover basic needs.

Currently, this program is developing through the Community Resilience Guild, a new 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization formed to build relational capacity and increase systemic awareness in Goshen and the surrounding region. The organization has provided office space, training, and general oversight through co-founders Phil Metzler and Philip Thomas.

Assumptions:

- ❖ Opportunities exist to support the work of local initiatives and organizations and to leverage the individual and collective effectiveness of this work in and for the community;
- ❖ Connecting the talent of top graduates from Goshen College with these local opportunities through our Fellows Program can offer an effective and economical way of providing work and services that connect local initiatives with similar goals and empowers these to achieve more collectively than they can individually;
- ❖ Some of the top achievers at Goshen College would have interest in this type of Fellows Program because it provides an opportunity to gain meaningful experience that serves to ground and deepen their recently acquired knowledge and skills by connecting to and working with concrete local initiatives.

Background - A Trial Run:

In the fall of 2015, Twila Albrecht and Ellie Schertz (both 2015 graduates of GC) began actively prototyping components of a program for retaining talent and catalyzing change, with support from the Community Resilience Guild. In their first 6 months, Twila and Ellie worked with the following organizations, performing a variety of activities related to mapping, research, communication, assessment, and supporting general organizational needs:

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| ❖ Goshen Farmers Market | ❖ Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes |
| ❖ Maple City Market | ❖ Merry Lea Environmental Learning |
| ❖ Community Relations Commission | ❖ Center's Woody Perennial Polyculture |
| ❖ Elkhart County Foodshed Initiative | ❖ FarmLab |

Types of support Fellows could provide:

Based on the experience of Twila and Ellie to date; previous collaboration and interviews with recent grads; and local needs related to the specific capacity building activities for which the Community Resilience Guild was formed, we envision Fellows providing the following types of services and support:

- ❖ **Assessments and Research:** Leading processes of participatory action research that: convene stakeholders working on similar issues; identify and articulate current challenges; and develop strategies for addressing them. The focus of this kind of research is first and foremost on producing actions that seek to achieve concrete changes while also ensuring a process of systematic inquiry that results in learning and enhanced institutional capacities for sustaining the work.
- ❖ **Mapping :** Working with stakeholders to understand the systems in which they work -- "connecting the dots" -- which may include:
 - o identifying different stakeholders working on common causes;
 - o organizing, and making readily accessible resources that exist - developing resource guides; and
 - o examining and making visible relationships between issues -- how they impact one another (circular causality) -- to enable broader and deeper understanding of key dynamics within a given system.
- ❖ **Process design and facilitation:** Designing events and processes for bringing together stakeholders working on similar or related issues to explore possibilities for networking and collaboration (see Community Gardens example below).
- ❖ **Identifying and catalyzing new and emerging initiatives:** Where opportunities are detected to support new initiatives, we seek to facilitate funding and provide platforms for innovation -- sandboxes of collaboration and experimentation that we sometimes refer to as "prototyping labs".
- ❖ **Strategic communications:** Conducting stakeholder interviews to help organizations communicate their work more effectively; and crafting stories in order to raise the profile of the work, increase public awareness, and make visible areas of potential connections.
- ❖ **Capacity Building:** Promoting trainings and capacity building processes that seek to strengthen individual and institutional capacities.
- ❖ **Supporting organizational needs:** We seek to be responsive to other needs detected within organizations or initiatives.

In providing these services, Fellows will primarily seek to contribute to activities or functions that organizations, and the community as a whole, recognize the value of, but generally lack the resources or capacity to carry out alone.

Community Gardens – One example from 2015-2016:

Ellie and Twila volunteered to interview local garden leaders to assess need and interest for networking more than 15 community gardens in Goshen. The gardens were typically functioning with little awareness of nearby church, school, neighborhood, and institutional gardens facing familiar challenges with community engagement, organizing, and production. The garden leader at Trackside Community Garden expressed that he was largely unaware that others were doing something very similar. He now feels that there are others he can connect with, learn from, and exchange experiences and resources with.

Through convening multiple public meetings during Goshen Farmers Market's Share the Bounty Week, Ellie and Twila helped connect garden and community leaders, and listened to common needs and aspirations. They profiled individual gardens in a series of posters sponsored by a grant from the Well Foundation, and developed a proposal for an online resource guide and part-time coordinator to support garden leaders by making local supplies, tools, volunteers, and expertise more accessible. The goal is an empowered network of community gardens, leaders, and advocates to nurture ongoing collaboration and assist new gardens. Visit www.gardengoshen.org for more information about this project.

From this project, Twila and Ellie identified a need to connect around the core question: What can we do collectively that we can't do individually? By naming this question, they have also identified other emerging initiatives that embody this collective interest of working collaboratively. They've discovered that recent graduates can provide energy and time for this exploration, helping the community strengthen current initiatives and improve collaboration at a low cost to organizations.

This example illustrates one way the Fellows Program can provide a "sandbox" for graduates and community leaders to collaborate and learn from each other through meaningful and practical initiatives.