About the Uncommon Communities Initiative

Uncommon Communities is a community and economic development program developed by the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute that marries the wisdom and methodology of Dr. Vaughn Grisham with the award-winning Breakthrough Solutions partnership under the direction of Dr. Mark Peterson at the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. This comprehensive program works to produce a group of community leaders who are equipped to assess, plan, visualize and mobilize citizenry to work together in the areas of economic development, education and workforce development, and quality of life and place—the critical elements of thriving communities—with an aim to help them become vibrant and sustainable in the 21st century global knowledge economy.

The Uncommon Communities Initiative began in 2015 and is designed to promote community and economic development in Arkansas. In its first three years, Uncommon Communities has worked with 71 participants from the following counties in the River Valley region of Arkansas: Conway, Perry, Pope, Van Buren and Yell. Community leaders in each of the five counties in the pilot group participated in bimonthly sessions held at the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute, and received technical assistance and community coaching from Institute staff and partners to complete more than 60 community development projects. These projects included community festivals and events, downtown development, leadership development, educational and health programs.

The Winthrop Rockefeller Institute is currently seeking communities to participate in its 2018 – 2020 cohort. In partnership with First Electric Cooperative, eligible communities will form a network of community leaders to participate in 10 bimonthly, day-long sessions at the Institute in addition to receiving technical assistance and community coaching from staff and partners in order to complete actionable goals.

For more information, please visit our website at rockefellerinstitute.org/uncommon or contact our program officer Samantha Evans. Samantha can be reached via phone at 501-727-6257 or via email at sevans@uawri.org.

About the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute

In 2005, the University of Arkansas System established the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute with a grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Charitable Trust. By integrating the resources and expertise of the University of Arkansas System with the legacy and ideas of Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller, this educational institute and conference center creates an atmosphere where collaboration and change can thrive.

To learn more, call 501-727-5435, visit the website at rockefellerinstitute.org, or stay connected through Twitter (@rockefeller) and Facebook (@rockefeller.institute).
The Uncommon Communities program brings together ALL the critical components of vibrant, sustainable communities and regions and puts tools in the hands of people in the community who have a stake in getting the work done. Here are a few questions and answers your community might find helpful as you consider becoming part of the program.

Frequently Asked Questions

How might my community become part of Uncommon Communities?
In partnership with First Electric Cooperative, the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute (WRI) is excited to offer this program exclusively to communities within First Electric’s service map area for the 2018 – 2020 cohort. Up to eight communities will be chosen from the 18 eligible counties in central and southeastern Arkansas. If your community is located within the First Electric Cooperative service map area and committed to building upon the assets within your community, contact the Institute to schedule a community meeting to discuss next steps and submit a Letter of Intent by July 6, 2018.

What is the timeline?
Community site visits and an initial listening campaign will begin in summer 2018 followed by an inaugural two-day session in September. This session will kick-off the bimonthly, nine-month, Year One program at the Institute. In-community assignments and development projects take place in the intervening months.

Who can attend the Uncommon Communities sessions at the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute?
During the initial listening campaign and community site visits, each community will form a steering committee to carry out the community's goals and action plan throughout the two-year program, while choosing up to five volunteer members per year to participate in the bimonthly sessions held at the Institute.

How much does it cost to become part of the program?
The Winthrop Rockefeller Institute and its partners work diligently to make this a cost-effective program for any individual to participate no matter their resources. At the same time, each community is expected to raise funds from local organizations each year to off-set program expenses. Thanks to First Electric Cooperative’s support to cover individual tuition, communities are only asked to contribute $500/person or $2,500/community.

What can my community expect to gain as part of Uncommon Communities?
At the end of two years, each community will have:
- A strategic blueprint and action plan for community development that has been thoughtfully conceived by community leaders who have obtained buy-in from their communities for the plan. The plan will set forth several components, including a vision, benchmarks, education, fundraising, job creation and training, and steps toward making their communities viable and vibrant in the 21st century economy.
- An ever-increasing number of citizens and organizations who are involved in the planning and development process in their community and region.
- A network of alumni from the program as well as ongoing access to Uncommon Communities partners from leading industries, businesses, and nonprofit organizations across the state who are committed to helping the region with their long-term plans.