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Mt. Auburn Associates

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Case Study of Maine's New Century Community Program

**Preliminary Impacts
February 2001**

**Prepared By
Mt. Auburn Associates**

**Prepared for
Maine's Cultural Affairs Council**

Preliminary Overview of Key Themes: Maine's New Century Community Program

Case Studies of Maine New Century Community Program

The five case studies as part of this report are part of a larger ongoing evaluation effort of the New Century Community Program to be completed in the summer of 2001. The case studies provide those involved in funding and managing the program a better sense of how communities have been using the resources and initial impressions about the type of impacts that the program is having.

Members of the Cultural Affairs Council, staff affiliated with the New Century Community Program, and Mt. Auburn Associates (the evaluators) worked together to select the five case studies. The case studies represent the diverse reaches of the program (urban, rural, statewide, high concentration of activity, innovative practices, program type). The five case studies are:

- Lewiston-Auburn -- High concentration of activity and community development outcome focus.
- St. John River Valley -- Rural grantee community and education outcome focus.
- Oxford County -- Innovative grantee community and library construction focus.
- Portland -- Urban grantee community and preservation outcome focus.
- Maine Music Trail -- Statewide significance and cultural tourism focus.

Meeting Maine's Current Economic Challenges and Opportunities

Maine is a state of economic contrasts - within the state there is a clear sense of the "two Maines." The southern part of the state has a healthy, vibrant economy with a very low unemployment rate and significant employment growth. On the other hand, much of Maine is very rural and its more remote, northern counties suffer from high unemployment, declining population, and limited economic growth.

The New Century Community Program, created by the Maine State Legislature in 1999, has provided all of the communities in Maine with significant new resources to address some of the state's key challenges as well to more fully build upon current opportunities. These opportunities and challenges include:

✦ *Supporting targeted industries: A number of the industries targeted for growth in the state of Maine depend upon a vibrant arts and cultural environment.*

- ✦ The entrepreneurs who start and grow technology based businesses, one of the economic clusters currently being targeted by the state, are attracted to Maine primarily because of its quality of life. Clearly, the state's artistic, cultural, and historic assets are a fundamental component of this quality of life.
- ✦ The retirement industry, another area targeted by the state, also requires a strong arts and cultural foundation. According to the Maine State Planning Office's report *A Golden Opportunity*, "National research has shown that among the strongest factors that influence where a person decides to retire are natural and cultural amenities."
- ✦ Tourism has been targeted by the state as one of Maine's key industries. Cultural tourism, which creates approximately 14,000 jobs, generates \$1.3 billion in direct and indirect expenditures, and attracts 2.5 million travelers to Maine¹, is an increasingly important part of the state's tourism industry. Continuing to attract these cultural tourists requires an investment in the state's cultural, historic, and artistic product.

✦ *Educating the state's workforce: There is increasing recognition that to thrive in the New Economy the state of Maine has to ensure that its existing residents have the necessary skills to compete and that its communities have the quality of life needed to attract skilled workers from outside of the state.*

- ✦ Economic boom times have created a labor shortage, particularly in Southern Maine. Enhancing the arts and cultural environment has become a more important aspect of attracting a skilled workforce to the state.
- ✦ Residents of Maine need to have a minimum level of literacy (beyond standard definitions of functional literacy) in order to be successful in practically any job in the current economy. Beyond the minimal level Efforts to promote increased literacy amongst the adults and children of the state of Maine will be an increasingly important part of building a skilled workforce.

✦ *Revitalizing communities: The economic development literature has assigned increasing importance to the strength of a community's civic life in creating sustainable community development.*

- ✦ The continued loss of population and economic activity in Maine's more rural communities, as well as its older industrial areas, is exacerbated by a poor self-image. A celebration of heritage and culture helps to create a more positive civic culture.

¹ "The Impact of Cultural Tourism in Maine," *The Creative Economy Initiative: The Role of the Arts and Culture in New England's Economic Competitiveness*, June 2000. Data compiled by Mt. Auburn Associates from the US Department of Commerce, Maine Office of Tourism, and the Maine State Planning Office.

- + "Social capital", defined by Robert Putnam as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit", is increasingly seen as one of the components of a healthy community.
- + A capacity of a community's "civic infrastructure" - the formal and information civic organizations that operate in a community - is an important element in revitalizing Maine's communities. When the civic infrastructure is strong it is able to create a vision for a community, it provides a voice for people who live in the community and its puts in place the resources to make the vision a reality.

Overview of Activity of Maine New Century Community Program

Since it was established the New Century Community Program has assisted the state of Maine and its communities with three types of activities:

1. Funding for arts and cultural related activities with statewide significance;
2. Grants to a wide range of community projects; and
3. Direct service and technical assistance.

Preliminary analysis of just the grant related activity, which accounts for about \$2.3 million of the total \$3.2 million expended through the New Century Community Program, found:

- + Over 420 grants throughout the state of Maine were funded;
- + Close to 780 individual projects were supported through the program;
- + The \$2.3 million in New Century funding helped to leverage an additional \$9.8 million through both direct and in-kind investments by the grantees and was a significant part of \$31 million in total project costs;²
- + Approximately \$1 million was spent directly on construction related projects - involving local libraries or historic properties. This funding leveraged an additional \$11 million in construction activity in Maine.
- + Approximately 2/3rds of the grants went to rural communities and 1/3rd to the state's larger cities and towns (those communities with a population of over 10,000).

Maine New Century Community Program - Responses to Economic and Social Challenges and Opportunities

While it is much too early to assess the full and longer term impacts of the state's investment in the New Century Community Program, the five case studies that were completed provide initial evidence that the program is generating a range of "intermediate" term impacts that have the potential to

² Data is derived from Maine's New Century Community Program documents.

address some of Maine's longer term economic challenges and opportunities. These intermediate term impacts include:

Educating the Community's Workforce

- ✦ *Improving the educational performance of youth and adults*
- ✦ *Increasing literacy among adults*
- ✦ *Increasing literacy among children*
- ✦ *Enhancing educational content*

Improving the Social Capital and Civic Infrastructure of the Community

- ✦ *Supporting the library as a pillar of civic life*
- ✦ *Promoting positive community image*
- ✦ *Increasing local capacity*
- ✦ *Creating community collaboration and partnerships*
- ✦ *Generating civic and corporate involvement*

Generating Economic Growth through Enhancing the Arts and Cultural Environment

- ✦ *Enhancing the cultural tourism product*
- ✦ *Generating innovative programming*
- ✦ *Increasing the menu of cultural offerings*
- ✦ *Creating new markets for cultural products*