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Leadership Lexington

RIPPLE EFFECTS
OF LEADERSHIP LEXINGTON

Creating Connections Across Differences & Moving Leaders to Action

WORKSHOP & REPORT BY:
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August 30, 2023

CELEBRATING 40+ YEARS
1980-2023

Overview of the Process

On August 30, 2023, twenty-three alumni and key supporters representing classes from 1980 to 2023 met at the Lexington Central Public Library to participate in a "Ripple Effects Mapping" (i.e., REM) workshop facilitated by Nicole Breazeale (University of Kentucky, Department of Community & Leadership Development) and Ruthie Caldwell (Vision Granted LLC) to share stories and explore the impacts of the past 40+ years of the program. REM is an evaluation method that engages stakeholders to visually map the chain of effects resulting from a program. REM combines elements of Appreciative Inquiry, mind mapping, group interviewing, and qualitative data analysis. More information about the process can be found online at https://publishing.lib.umn.edu/publication/a-field-guide-to-ripple-effects-mapping/.

During the process, participants grouped into pairs to share stories answering the following questions:

1. Tell me a story about a high point, achievement, or success based on your involvement with Leadership Lexington.
2. Share a story about how your involvement with Leadership Lexington has positively affected you and organizations or institutions you work with?
3. What changes in your community or the broader region have resulted from Leadership Lexington that you are proud to share?

Following discussion in pairs, the group reconvened to share leadership impact stories while Kelly May (University of Kentucky, Department of Community & Leadership Development) captured the stories using a "mind mapping" software called XMind, which was projected onto a screen. Afterward, the facilitators met to discuss themes and insights. This report outlines the Key Themes resulting from the impacts and stories shared during the workshop. Attached you will also find a themed version of the mind maps created from the event. A video produced by Mark Pearson (University of Kentucky Communications) highlighting key moments during the workshop is available at: www.facebook.com/UKCLD/videos/828977912190462.

Ripple Effects

Leadership Lexington...

01 Promotes Diversity & Cross-Cultural Collaboration

02 Stimulates Personal Growth

03 Anchors Leaders to Community

04 Helps Local Organizations Prosper

05 Moves Leaders to Action

Leadership Lexington is “the common thread that moves people to action.”

01

Promotes Diversity & Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Leadership Lexington increases the local commitment to equity and diversity, fueling an intentional movement towards the broader cultural shift of helping organizations become more inclusive.

By creating a "safe space where learning and connection can happen," Leadership Lexington prompts "open, honest conversations" that bridge the cultures of race, age, gender, politics, and more. Participants connect "on a human level" and have conversations with respect where they may disagree, but "still have the love" and can go out afterward together as friends. "Raw, real conversations" occur that reflect community-wide diversity issues, and lessons learned often "spill over into the workplace" with some of these conversations sparking diversity initiatives throughout Lexington. For instance, one participant shared that a Diversity & Inclusion program started at their company as a result. Another company intentionally began recruiting diverse interns, and a public board intentionally recruited a Hispanic member to better represent community.

A 2015 alum said, "We asked 'Why do the companies not have leaders that look like Lexington?'" From that, the Steering Committee began intentionally bringing more diverse leaders to the program. One alum "helped us identify community members to invite" and from that she brought others from diverse cultures with her. "The 2019 class looked more like Lexington as the result of intentionality."

"We asked 'Why do the companies not have leaders that look like Lexington?'"

"When I go through the door, I bring everyone with me."

02.....

Stimulates Personal Growth

Some alums shared how they had to push themselves before they even began the program. Even the application process pushed them beyond their comfort zone and forced them to ponder their own leadership goals like never before. The program helped them become more self-aware of their personal strengths, to identify challenges, gain tools and skills to become a better leader, and then share those skills with others. One alum said, “I learned to lead leaders.” Another said: “It changed my life. It changed my business. I have seven employees now...when I came [to Leadership Lexington], it was just me.”

The first retreat was mentioned often, sparking connection, vulnerability, and self-awareness, with comments like: “There’s something about it that brings out the best in the people that are there for the right reasons,” “You are exposed to areas you are unfamiliar with,” and “We are actively working toward a common goal.” One participant explained the program fosters intentional vulnerability, and quoted Brené Brown stating: “Vulnerability is the birthplace of connection.”

One sponsor explained they invest in this program because it accelerates leaders: “It would have taken 20 years to unleash some folks, but we’ve got them going now.”

"It changed everything for me."

03

Anchors Leaders to Community

Leadership Lexington increases community pride and commitment to stay. An alum from another state said: “My wife has had (job) opportunities to move” closer to family, but they choose to stay here because now “this network is my family.” Another said a windstorm shut down the Day Cares, but peers helped them find a babysitter to keep working. Each cohort creates strong relationships of trust and support. Multiple alums mentioned their peers rallying and coming to the aid of someone in their class, whether due to personal struggles, a house fire, or illness. “It was one of the hardest years of my life; but the best because of connections and support.”

One alum said, “It’s not just like a sorority or fraternity thing. It’s deeper than that. It bonds everyone together.” Some gained mentors. Others gained a deeper sense of connection. Some explained how Leadership Lexington helped them feel rooted in the community by taking them behind “the curtain” to experience places and meet local leaders they normally would not meet. It also helped alums gain a perspective of “community over self” changing the purpose of their work to better serve the community, and even inspired some to run for public office with fellow alums offering their skills to support peers in their campaigns.

"If I hadn’t gone through Leadership Lexington, I probably wouldn’t still be in Lexington. This network is my family now. "

"The family you make through this is HUGE. The connections that happen are way above and beyond."

04

Helps Local Organizations Prosper

Organizations gained more networks and financial support to achieve their mission. As participants grew personally and professionally, they shared their new skills and connections with their employers, which then strengthened organizations. Impacts included reports of increased sales of for-profit businesses and connected all organizations involved with access to recruit high-quality job candidates or board members as alums shared opportunities with their peers. It also improved fundraising and volunteer recruitment for non-profits. For example, one alum was inspired during the program to start a nonprofit for marginalized youth and has since gained peer support and raised $20,000 in grants.

Additionally, participants often became aware of other organizations and local resources, to help their companies grow. This was especially evident during hard times, such as the pandemic. One business owner shared that they were able to gain $40,000 of grant funding to keep their business open during COVID because of funding opportunities shared by the Leadership Lexington network. Another business owner explained they lost most of their customers when the pandemic hit, but their connections to Leadership Lexington helped them pivot; because of the strong base of support, confidence, and access to resources through Leadership Lexington networks, the company was able to develop a new business model amid COVID and has now grown more than ever.

"During COVID, we not only survived, but thrived."

05

Moves Leaders to Action

Leadership Lexington brings in emerging, “rising star” leaders and then opens doors for them while also sharpening their skills, broadening their networks, and helping them find the community causes that matter most to them. Once these leaders have skills, connections, and purpose, they can “put their energy there and make change.”

Some alumni added that it gives their peers connections and credibility, so when their employer needs someone, they can say “I know a guy” and “this person was in my class” so they already have established trust and know their work ethic. The trust that is built during this program, especially while working on projects together and during the “decompression” time afterward, “is so important. When you build friends like that you start to make more moves, and you and like-minded people move in more directions.”

In essence, Leadership Lexington develops leaders, helps them build trust, and provides opportunities for them to turn their ideas into action working together for the common good. Some of the projects include:

- Unsung Heroes Ball: celebrating our community’s public servants.
- DiverCity Festival: celebrating Lexington’s various cultures annually in April.
- Lexington Forward: a peer group model adopted by Commerce Lexington that provides a safe space for nonprofit leaders to collaborate on governance, strategy and stewardship to advance nonprofit excellence.
- An initiative of more than 200 meetings that increased community involvement in Lexington’s comprehensive plan.
- A program that created more political engagement, so people knew where and how to register to vote.

Leadership Lexington “moves people to action.”

After Ripple Effects Mapping...

The REM process is an exceptional method of capturing the impacts of a program on a community. It is, however, limited in capturing the full impact by the number of participants and their memories. It is for this reason, that the facilitators of this process encourage Leadership Programs to help this process live on. Invite others to tell their stories of impact. Collect those stories and add them to expand the assessment map.

Moving forward, the Leadership program can use REM results in several ways. Looking at important areas of success allows the team to focus on what is working well, and to be certain to "build in" those processes needed to sustain those results. In addition, looking at areas where additional success could be gained allows the program to design and grow in new areas. This report could be used to springboard future discussions and plan projects to grow the impact of the program.

Attachment A shows information from the mind map notated during the meeting and Attachment B shows a list the REM participants shared at the end when asked to describe the impact of Leadership Lexington in one word or phrase.

This Ripple Effect Mapping process is supported through CEDIK and the Department of Community and Leadership Development at the University of Kentucky.

For additional support contact Daniel Kahl or Nicole Breazeale at: https://cld.ca.uky.edu/extension

Attachments

A Mind Map: Themed Session Notes

01 Promotes Diversity & Cross-Cultural Collaboration

02 Stimulates Personal Growth

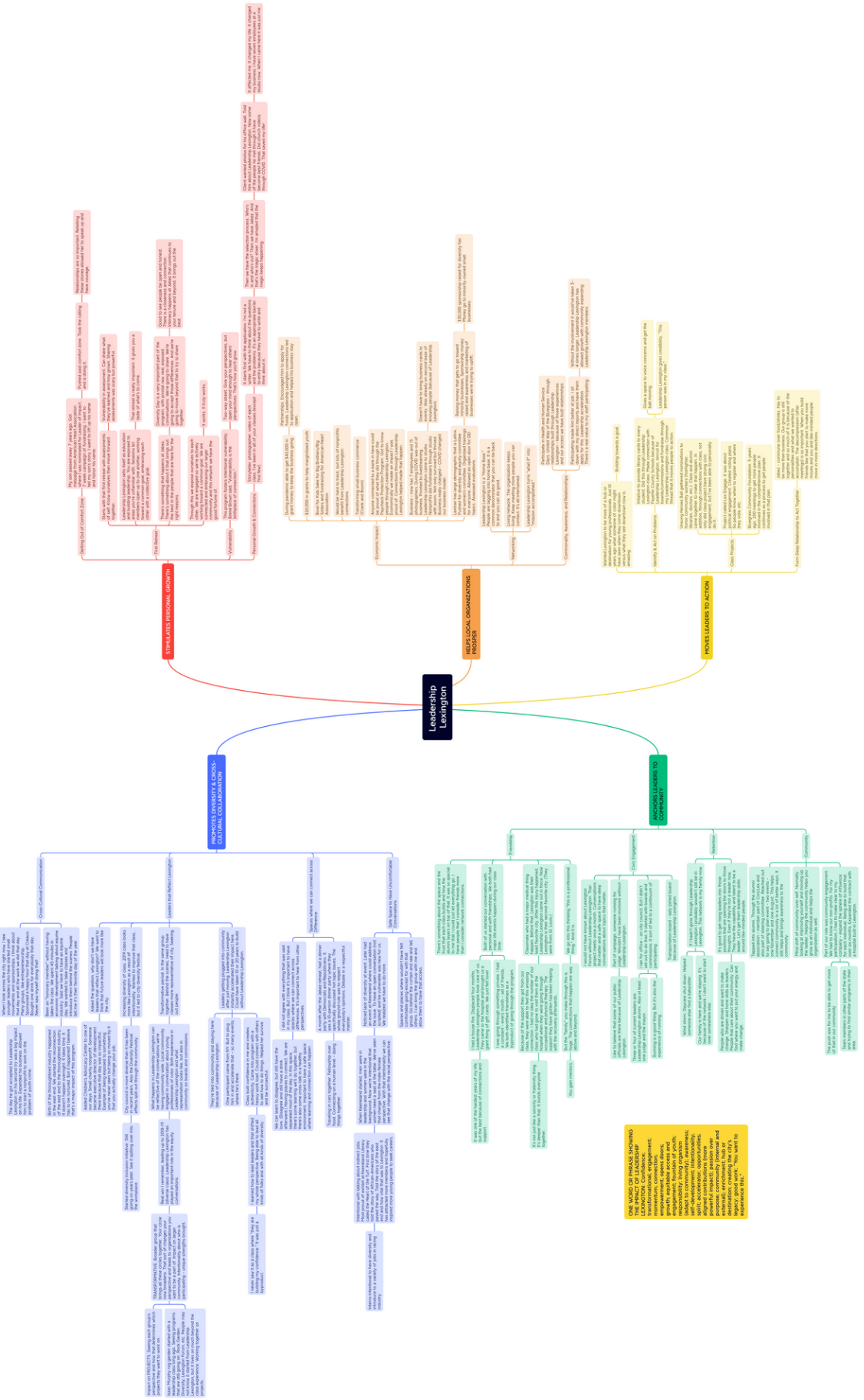
03 Anchors Leaders to Community

04 Helps Local Organizations Prosper

05 Moves Leaders to Action

B One Word or Phrase Describing Impact of Leadership Lexington

A Mind Map: Themed Session Notes (overall view)

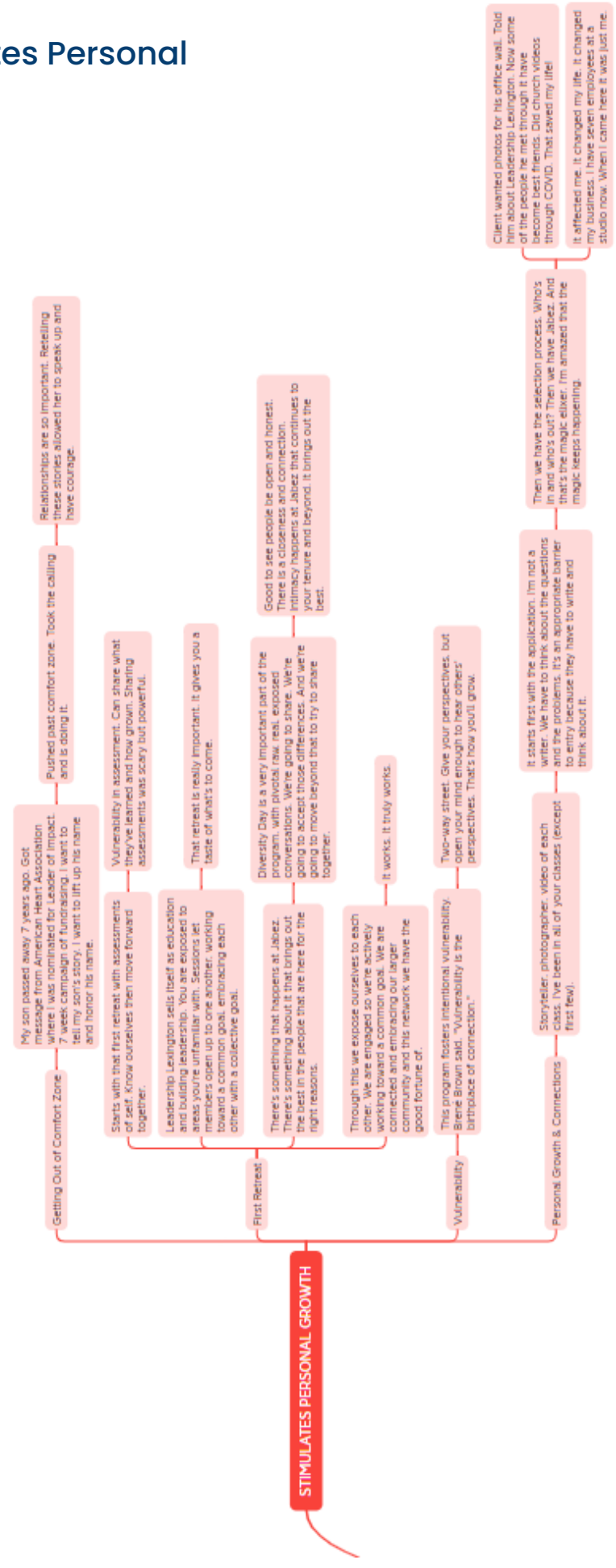


01

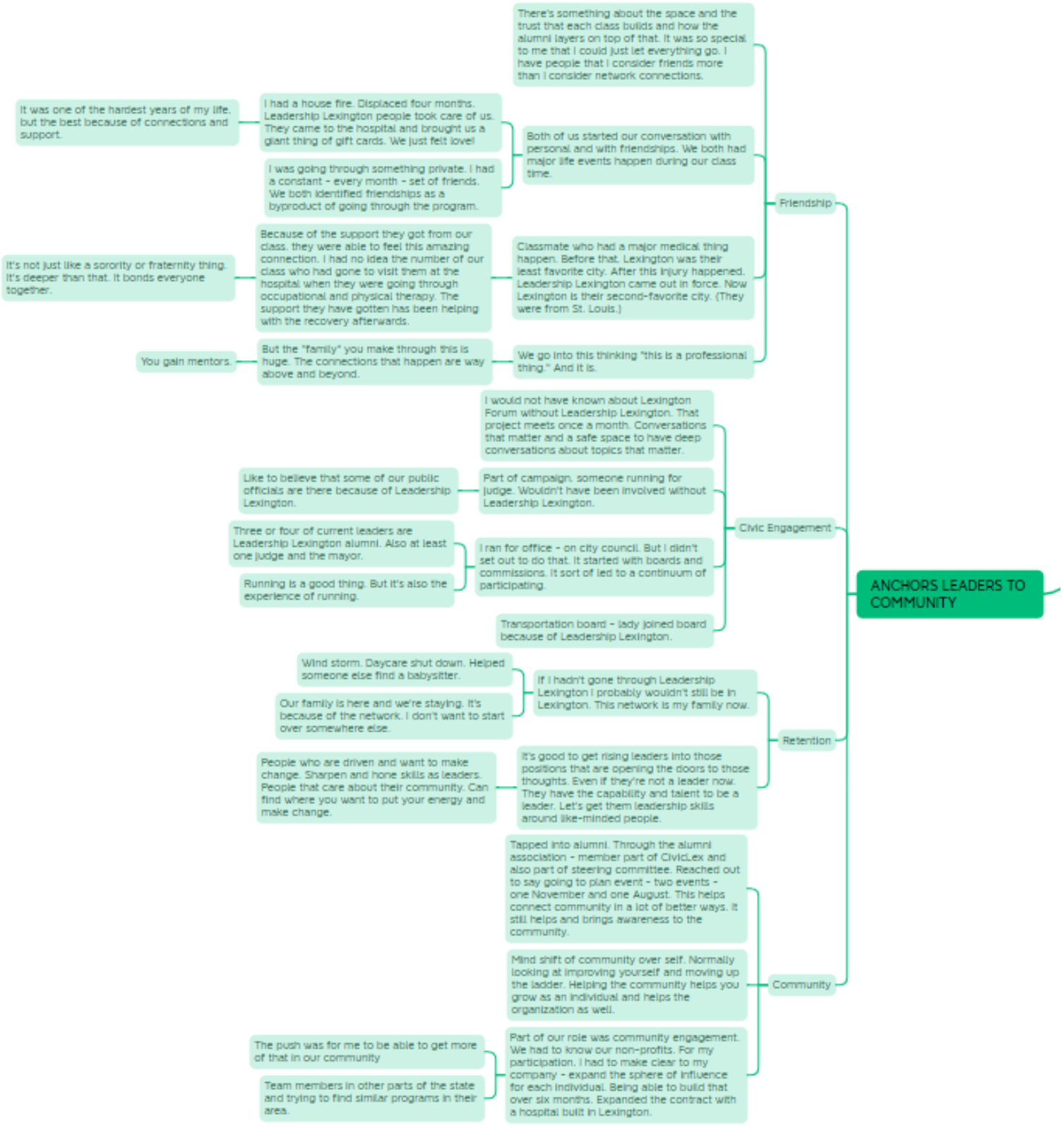
Promotes Diversity & Cross-Cultural Collaboration

02

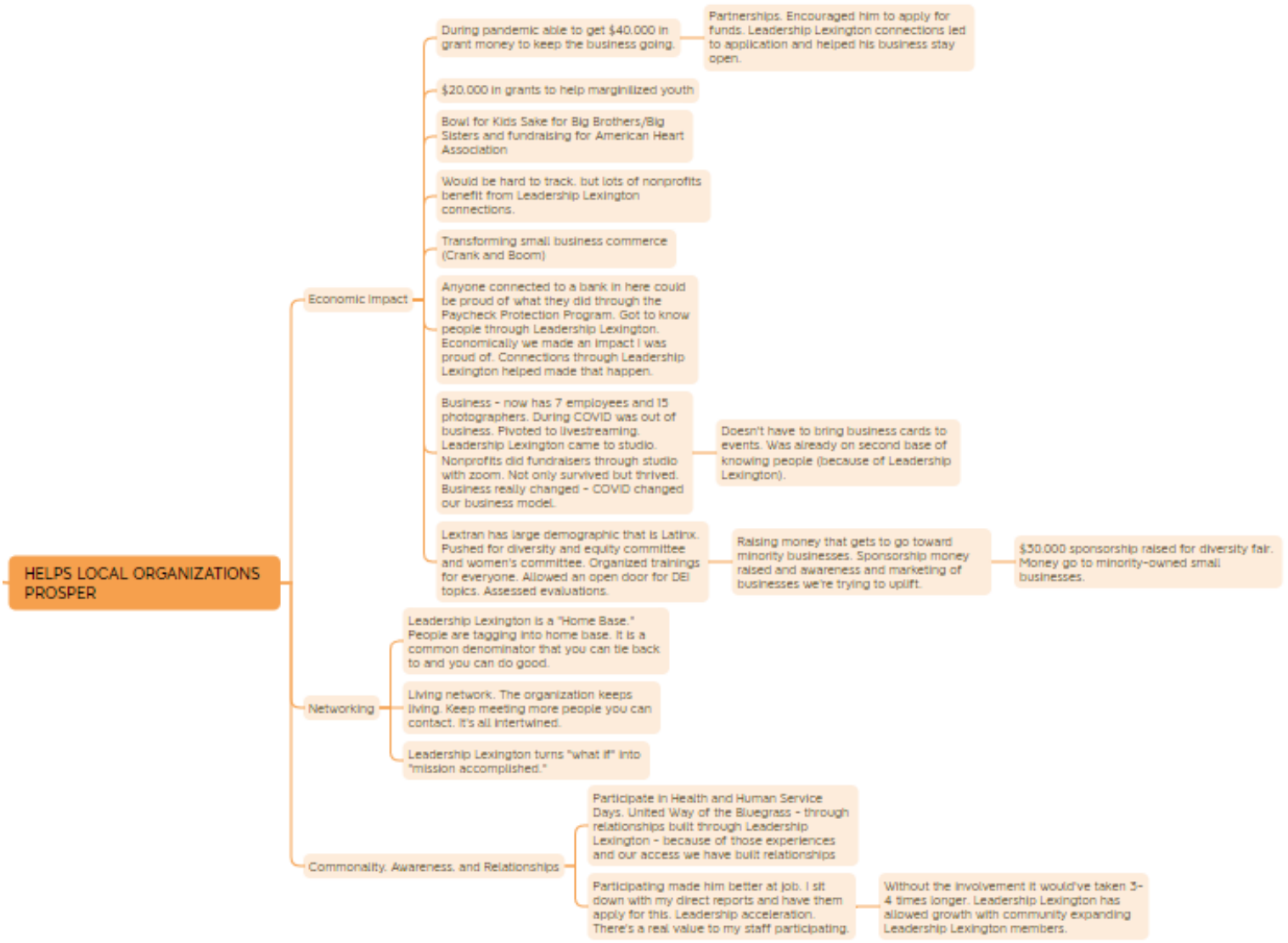
Stimulates Personal Growth



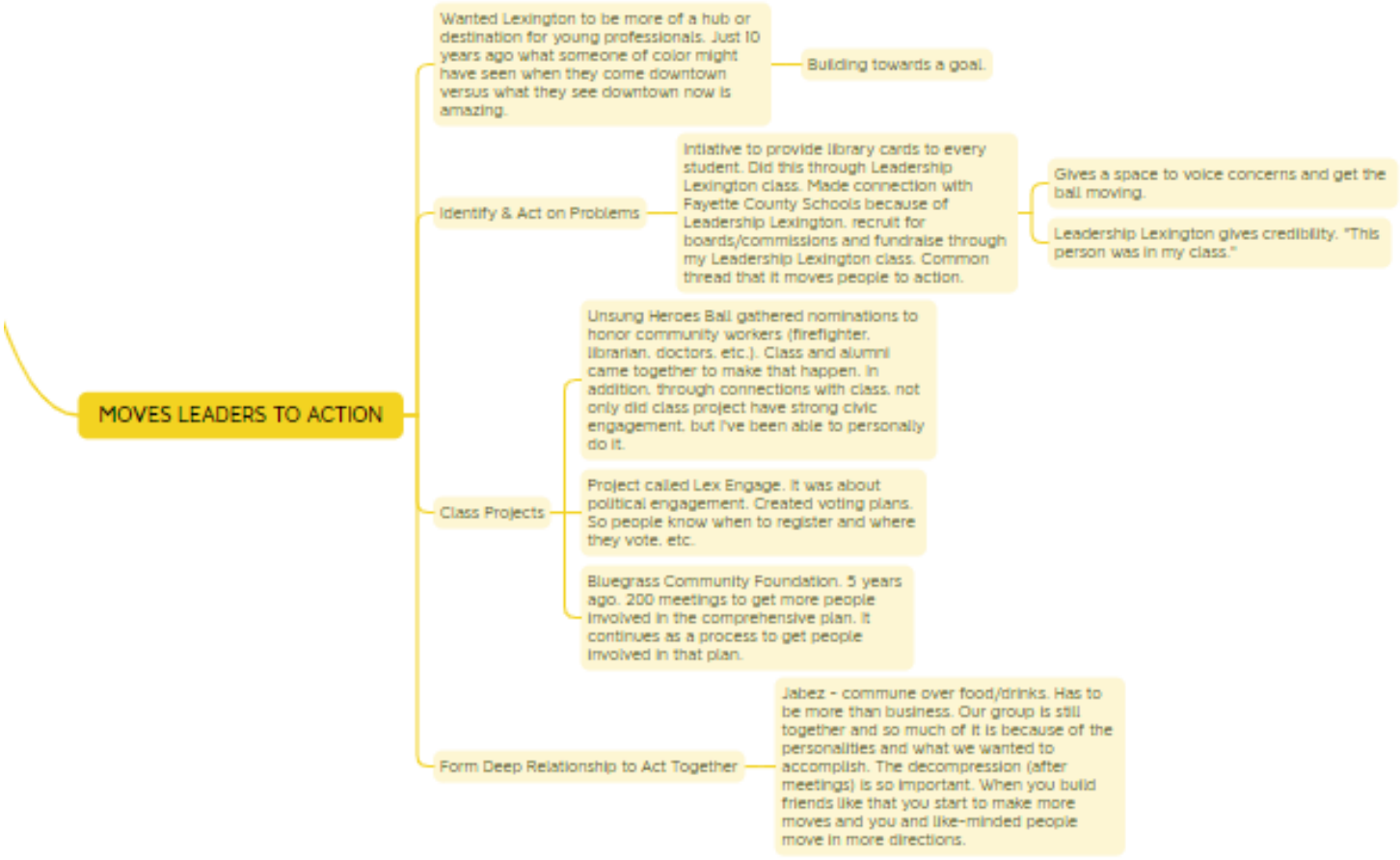
03 Anchors Leaders to Community



04 Helps Local Organizations Prosper



05 Moves Leaders to Action



B

One Word or Phrase Showing the Impact of Leadership Lexington

CONFIDENCE

transformational

MOMENTUM

COMMUNITY

CONNECTION

ENGAGEMENT

hub

OPENS DOORS

destination

awareness

SPIRIT

intentionality

GROWTH

passion over purpose

responsibility

self development

aligned contributions

OPPORTUNITIES

EQUITABLE ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT

fountain of youth

YOU WANT TO EXPERIENCE THIS

GOOD WORK

LIVING ORGANISM

ACCELERATOR

enrichment

creating the city's legacy