

Utilizing the Community Capitals Framework and Community Network Mapping to Analyze the Impacts of COVID-19 and the Federal Stimulus Packages on Poverty in Vinton County, Ohio.

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To mom, dad, and the rest of my family – this one's also for you. I love you, and I hope that you are proud. Thank you for listening to me drone on about this paper for months and answering the countless questions I had for you all. You are all authors of this paper as well.

To first-generation college students and students who come from communities like mine: You are worthy of all your accomplishments and more. You deserve to find yourself in academic spaces such as research, and I am so proud of you. I hope that I have inspired you because you inspire me every day.

And finally, to Vinton County I thank for everything. I hope that one day our small collection of villages can see a brighter future, full of opportunity and hope. Vinton County deserves so much, and I hope Appalachian Ohio benefits from conversations such as this.

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Introduction

In March 2020, the world came to a stunning halt as the COVID-19 pandemic surpassed 500,000 cases around the globe (World Health Organization, 2020). Countries around the world entered mass lockdowns, closing offices, schools, and other non-essential services, and encouraged social distancing, the adoption of facial coverings, and other mandates. The pandemic has affected not only global health, but the economic viability of communities, social responsibility, both contingency and emergency planning strategies of global and local leaders, and has shifted the culture of our world as we know it. Globally to locally, it is no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic has been the influence behind many changes, including financial adjustments in areas of the United States already struggling before the pandemic hit.

Nestled in the rolling foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Southeast Ohio, Vinton County is known for its beautiful scenery and wild outdoor adventures (Parks & Recreation, 2016). Vinton County, Ohio is most notably known as Ohio's least populated county and most heavily forested with over 77.5% of land covered by forests (Holley, 2020). The county consists of closely knit villages and townships, none over a population of 2,000 (Holley, 2020). There is one local school district, one grocery store, and only one traffic light within the entirety of the county lines – fun facts shared by every Vinton County resident with those they meet outside the community. Vinton County is a place where everyone knows everyone and gives off a safe, small-town feel.

Vinton County has been identified as one of the poorest counties in the state of Ohio with a poverty rate over 20% (Data USA, 2021). As the impact of COVID-19 progresses, it is not yet

understood just how much the pandemic has affected the community. It is known, however, that the pandemic has sent as many as 8 million Americans into poverty, leaving Vinton County residents to wonder when they will be next (Parolin, et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study is to document recent direct and indirect causes of poverty in Vinton County, Ohio, and how COVID-19 and the federal stimulus bills have affected poverty in the area from March 2020 to January 2022. Through the concepts of the "Community Capitals Framework" and community network mapping, this research aims to provide Vinton County community leaders and organizations with an understanding of which community assets impact poverty and what areas they can improve upon to address the issue, while taking COVID-19 and federal relief into consideration.

Research Questions

The research questions posed in this study are:

1. How have COVID-19 and the federal stimulus bills affected poverty in Vinton County, Ohio?
2. How does local leadership affect decisions regarding poverty and aid distribution?
3. What organizations and leaders are identified within the community, and how do they facilitate bonding and/or bridging social capital to aid the community?

Discussion of Key Terms

For this study, poverty is defined by financial terms. Financial poverty relates to the number of families living beneath the federal poverty line, which is \$26,500 for a typical four-person household (ASPE, 2021). Community poverty relates to the financial ranking of the community in its relation to poverty and other communities using the Appalachian Regional

Commission's ranking system. Poverty is a multifaceted, complex subject and cannot be fully explored in this paper but can be explored on a case-study basis in Vinton County, Ohio.

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) are organizations located within Vinton County's network of support and engagement. These organizations can vary in type of organization, size, and services provided. CBOs are characterized by their direct influence on the community by addressing an issue or need in the Vinton County area. These CBOs are not required to be organized, registered, and/or managed within the Vinton County "community" to qualify as within the network for this study, but are required to significantly contribute to the development of Vinton County community capitals.

Community leaders are described by three terms: civil servants, public servants, and community servants. Civil servants are those directly employed by the government and carry out political leadership duties on behalf of the government. Public servants are community leaders appointed by the government to serve the public, and for this study, community servants are defined as members of the community who voluntarily serve their community within unpaid service positions and/or organizations. Community leaders may represent CBOs.

Based on the Community Capitals Framework established by Emery & Flora (2006), community capitals are defined by the seven community assets utilized in every community structure. These community capitals are built, cultural, financial, human, natural, political, and social assets. Indicators for these community capitals can be found in Appendix B. Built capital is the infrastructure found within the community and supports other community capital development (i.e. schools support human capital). Cultural capital includes the social norms and cultural preferences that dominate the area, which influences knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, and traditions. Financial capital is defined as any and all financial resources within and

available to a community. Human capital reflects the population of the community, held skills and knowledge within the population, and ability to build community. Natural capital includes a community's physical, location-based assets, in which a community shapes its culture (i.e. a coal mining community). Political capital is the presence of power and hierarchy in a community, indicative of the people's voice and access to power organizations. Finally, social capital refers to the social connectiveness of a community and the communication that makes development happen. In terms of social capital, "*bonding social capital* refers to those close redundant ties that build community cohesion. *Bridging social capital* involves loose ties that bridge among organizations and communities" (Emery & Flora, 2006).

Literature Review

Emery & Flora (2006) paved the way for systems perspectives on community change using the Community Capitals Framework (CCF). Their development of the CCF allowed for a shift in the way in which researchers perceive change in communities, who impacts said change, and what happens to community assets before, during, and after change is made. The CCF measures the interaction and flow of natural, cultural, social, financial, human, built, and political capitals, and how these capitals impact the community. The CCF focuses more on assets and their investments, rather than a needs-based approach like in this paper, and this framework is a great base to introduce community network mapping and asset flow to community leaders in Vinton County.

Sharp (2001) further explains the concept of community structures and introduces network mapping as a way to understand the impact of community leaders in the community structure. Using the Community Capitals Framework and Sharp's assessments of community

power structures, we can analyze the flow of capitals, their influencers, and how it is impacting the community (positively, neutrally, or negatively).

In their book *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*, Flora, Flora, & Gasteyer (2016) outline the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Approach as a self-help model for community change. This model uses existing community capitals as building blocks for a needs-based assessment. The AI approach assists communities in determining what assets are doing best, what could work better, and create a plan for desired outcomes. The AI approach, in conjunction with the CCF, looks at how community leaders can build on what is already in their community, and work to make it better. Another important facet of the AI approach explored in this paper relates to the role of “community brokers,” or those within the community who link the community with collaborators and partners to achieve the shared vision – which relates directly to Sharp’s detailed flow of capitals using network mapping and power structures. Not all collaborators are found within the community, and some assets or assistance may need to come from outside the community. The bonding/bridging of social capital in this process leads to the expansion of both community assets and community networks.

Powers (1975) skillfully and succinctly articulates the methods of identifying community leaders and their assets. Powers describes the characteristics of most community leaders and steps to take when working with them and demonstrates the relevance of community power structures.

Parolin et al. (2020) detail monthly poverty rates in the United States during the COVID-19 Pandemic. As we look to understand how COVID-19 has affected poverty in Vinton County, Ohio, we first need to understand how it is affecting the country as a whole. Parolin, et. al. describes the impacts of the pandemic on those in poverty in the United States, and projects

monthly poverty rates before and throughout the pandemic. Parolin, et. al. analyzes the federal relief bills, such as the CARES Act, and how they affected poverty rates throughout the nation. They found several conclusive results, such as “the CARES Act stimulus checks and unemployment benefits lifted more than 18 million individuals out of poverty in April but fell to around 4 million after the expiration of the \$600.00 per week unemployment supplement.”

Han, Meyer, & Sullivan (2020) also outline the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty and income in the United States. Han, Meyer, and Sullivan provide much needed context regarding statistical analysis of the economic impact of COVID-19. Their real-time poverty analyses provide a greater connection to what is really happening with the unemployment rate and household incomes during the early stages of the pandemic to now. During their initial studies, Han, Meyer, and Sullivan noted a decline in poverty across the nation by 1.3% – attributing the decline in poverty to the one-time stimulus payments issued early in the pandemic (April and May 2020). Their real-time COVID-19 Income and Poverty Dashboard provided context and information for the two-year duration of this study, and continued to follow poverty rates throughout the pandemic and its aid distribution. As pandemic aid expired in December 2020, the poverty rate rose 2.1%, thrusting 7 million Americans under the poverty line (Han, Meyer, & Sullivan, 2020). From January 2020 to February 2022, the poverty rate has fluctuated between 9.2% and 12.2% nationally but has fallen back to pre-pandemic numbers as pandemic assistance has expired. At the start of the pandemic, poverty initially rose sharply due to mass shutdowns, and declined sharply due to governmental aid and stimulus funding. Throughout the pandemic, poverty steadily rises and falls as pandemic aid expires, is restarted, and the economy restructures – as seen in Figure 1. Han, Meyer, and Sullivan provide a visual representation as to how pandemic aid distribution has affected poverty in the United States as seen below.

**Percent Below Federal Poverty Line or Multiple of the Federal Poverty Line, Basic Monthly CPS,
January 2020 to Date**
(Below 100% Poverty Threshold)

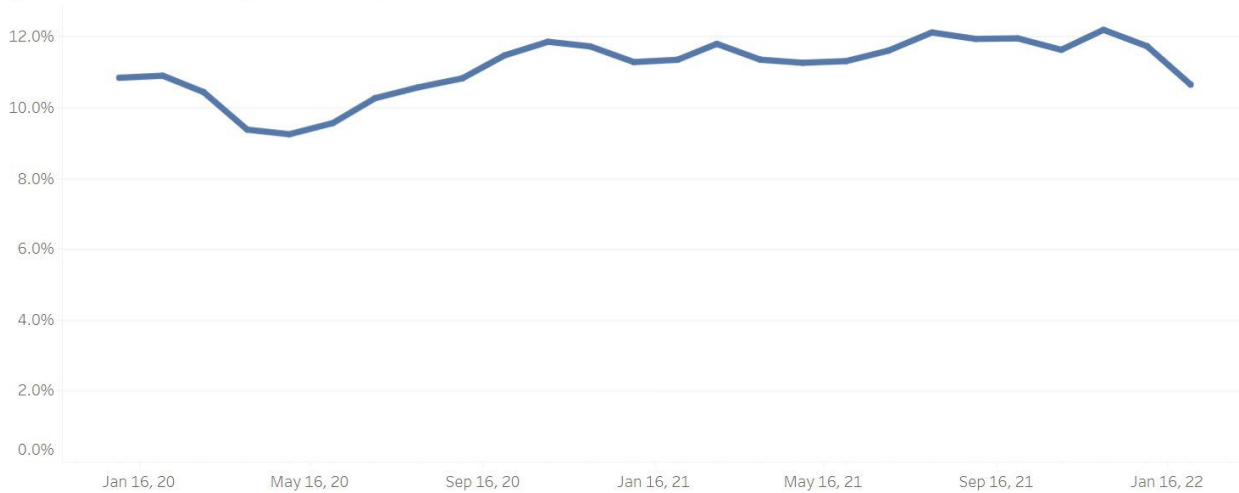


Figure 1: Han, Meyer, & Sullivan (2020)

Sample & Research Methodology

For this study, a list of community leaders and community-based organizations (CBOs) have been identified through observation and snowball sampling, a method used during research recruitment where participants are asked to assist in identifying other potential subjects (Oregon State University, 2017). As of December 2021, representatives from the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Jackson-Vinton Community Action, the Gallia-Vinton Educational Service Center, the Vinton County Development Department, Vinton County Local School District, Vinton County Ohio State University Extension, local businesses such as the Weeping Willow Boutique and The Bronzer Tanning Salon, the Governor’s Office of Appalachia, Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission, Ohio Southeast Economic Development, and the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio have contributed knowledge for this research paper.

Representatives from the Vinton County Local Government have also spoken on COVID-19 relief and poverty in the area, including the Vinton County Commissioners office, the Vinton

County Auditor’s office, the Vinton County Court of Common Pleas, and the Vinton County Treasury.

Representatives from these CBOs consented to participation in a virtual interview where they could choose to be recorded or not. Each participant received a copy of the interview questions, which remain the same between organizations. These interview questions can be found in Appendix A. Questions were adjusted slightly for representatives of organizations outside of the Vinton County area, such as the Appalachian Regional Commission, which is based in Washington D.C. but have a regional focus that encompasses Vinton County, Ohio. These adjusted questions can also be found in Appendix A. After interviews, each participant’s answers were compiled and compared to note similarities and differences among them.

During the interview process, using the snowball sampling method defined by Oregon State University (2017), participants were asked to identify any community leaders or organizations they feel are influential to the Vinton County area or their own organization’s mission. These inter-organizational connections between community organizations allowed for a comprehensive community network map to be constructed, detailing the exchange of community capitals between CBOs and community leaders. This community network map (Figure 2), developed in RStudio, can be used by Vinton County leaders to visualize the exchange in capitals throughout the community.

Vinton County Community Network Map Key			
Category	Capital(s)	Group #	Color
Community Development CBOs	Political/Financial/Human	1	Purple
Education	Human	2	Green
Vinton County Community Services	Political/Financial	3	Blue
Higher Government	Political/Financial	4	Orange
Vinton County Businesses	Financial/Human	5	Pink

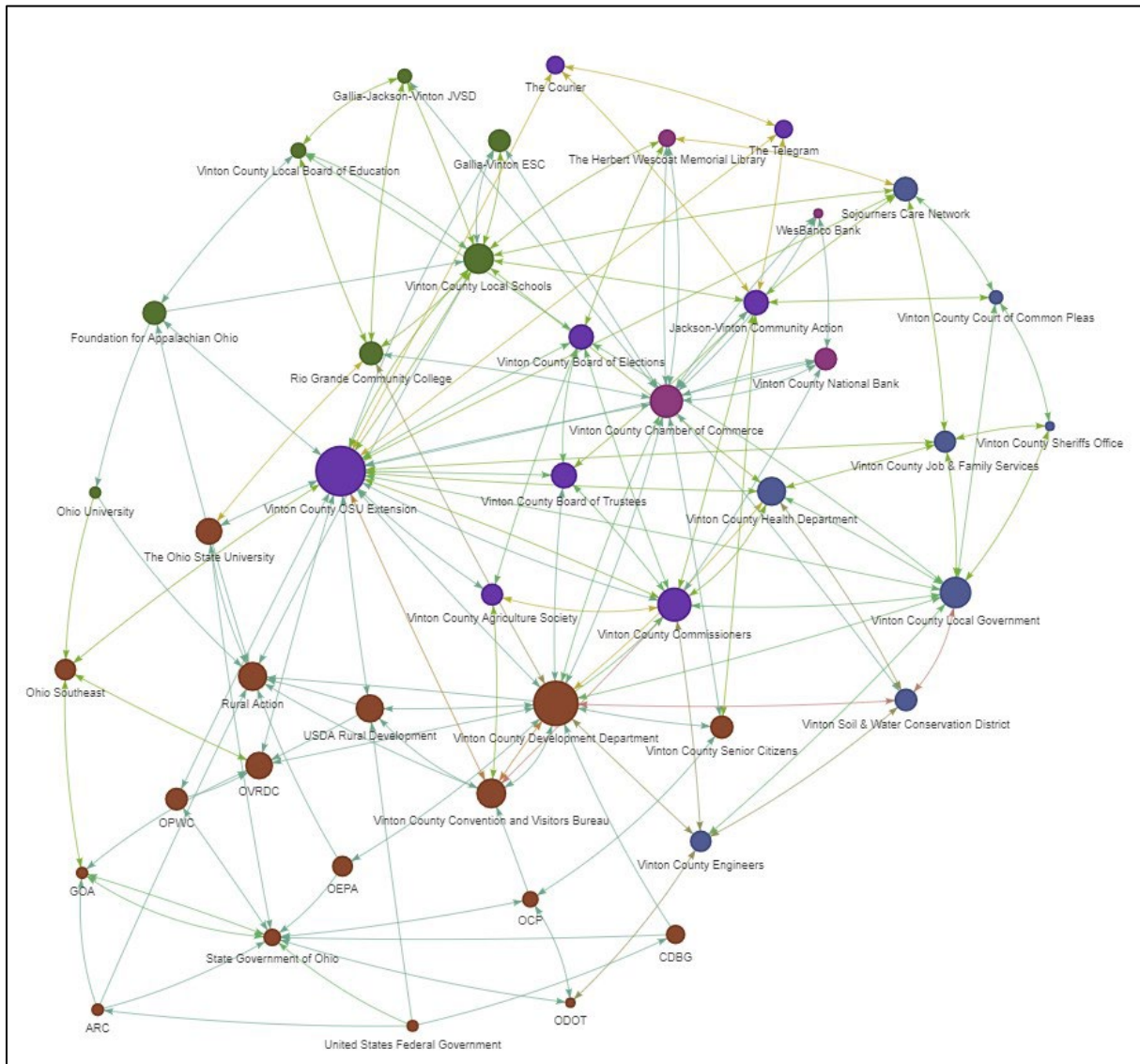


Figure 2: Vinton County Community Network Map

The Vinton County community network outlines the transfer of community capitals between Vinton County CBOs auto categorized into five sub-categories: Community Development CBOS, Education, Vinton County Community Services, Higher Government, and Vinton County Businesses. Please note that there is some error in the auto-categorization of some CBOs, which does not affect the significance of these results. Grouped by number, these categories interact mostly through financial, political, and human capitals. It is also important to

note, however, that all seven community capitals are heavily interrelated and are also impacted by the community network, although not specifically shown. This is explored in the Current Results and Analysis section below. As seen on the Vinton County Community Network Map, CBOs are indicated by color coded dots and the transfer of assets by thin arrows between them. Some circles are larger than others, indicating the frequency in which CBOs interact with other CBOs. These organizations are those that oftentimes find themselves in the middle of most community development work, and partnering with other organizations, financial partners, businesses, and members of the community to make development happen – especially during the COVID-19 pandemic which created an increased demand for community development practices. Results of the map indicate that community organizations depicted with smaller circles on the map, with less outgoing and incoming arrows, could bridge and/or bond social capital to expand the Vinton County Community Network, create opportunities for developmental partnerships, and provide the opportunity to relieve some of the workload from some of the more involved CBOs on the map.

Current Results and Analysis

Vinton County, Ohio, like many other Appalachian communities, holds a multitude of assets that benefit the community, while lacking in areas that are critical to community and its economic development. A needs-based approach was utilized to analyze Vinton County’s assets and deficits, which were then categorized as indicated by the seven community capitals defined by Emery & Flora (2006). When interviewed, community leaders were asked for their opinion on Vinton County’s greatest and most deficient assets, keeping in mind the various roles they hold in the community (leader, parent, resident, business owner, etc.). The results are as follows:

Interviewee Votes by Community Capital		
Community Capital	Votes for Greatest Asset	Votes for Most Deficient Asset
Built Capital	1	7
Cultural Capital	9	2
Financial Capital	2	14
Human Capital	1	6
Natural Capital	11	1
Political Capital	2	2
Social Capital	7	2

Built

According to local business owners and community development professionals in the area, built capital is the community capital that needs the most attention in Vinton County. Infrastructure for specifically water and rural broadband were cited as Vinton County’s two largest issues, and if improved, would solve many of the other issues the county faces. Recently, built capital in the Vinton County community has seen great strides in efforts to improve the area. Projects put on by the Vinton County Development Department and the Jackson-Vinton Community Action have improved built capital through safe water infrastructure, waste management facility improvements, roadways and bridges, village beautification, and housing upgrades.

Overall, built capital in Vinton County has been visibly left behind, but more recent proposals to fix the county infrastructure have been overwhelmingly supported and successful. Feedback from interviewees noted that the county allocates a great deal of time, money, and energy into fixing roadways, leading to positive thoughts about the county transportation department, but also noted that there are still some areas of the county that need attention when it comes to safe, graveled or paved, reliable roadways. Housing in most of the area consists of

dilapidated and run-down properties that dot the countryside and downtown areas of the community and are noted by interviewees as a large indicator of a deficient built capital stock in the county. Recently, the county tourism department and local Development Department have taken interest in revitalizing the area by identifying, updating and/or demolishing blighted and vacant buildings located in the county. The purchase of Vinton County's oldest surviving structure, Hotel McArthur, is an example of progress in the growth of the area's built capital stock. With the purchase and renovation of the historic hotel, the county hopes to promote tourism and provide an updated space that brightens the downtown area of McArthur. Countless other infrastructure projects secured through grant funding, such as the installment of new bridges in remote areas of the county, new community park updates and equipment, renovations, and more have also been successful in the area.

The lack of rural broadband and reliable cellular service issues presented themselves widely during the pandemic as families attended school and worked full-time from home. Vinton County, already known as one of the most impoverished counties in Ohio alongside Athens, Scioto, Adams, and Pike counties, comes in short compared to their rural broadband access. Vinton County broadband coverage expands only 38.2% of the county, whereas Athens, Scioto, Adams, and Pike counties have a whopping 74.9% coverage average (Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies, 2021). The 2021 Ohio Poverty Report directly connects poverty with rural broadband access, noting that both rural areas and urban areas struggle with reliable internet access, and further supports the connection between built and financial capitals (Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies, 2021).

Water access and integrity in Vinton County was heavily cited as a source of problems for growth in the community. The chart below describes the significance of the reliable

water issue in Vinton County. Approximately 46% of rural households in Vinton County do not have reliable water.

Vinton County Households and Access to Reliable Water	
Total of all households in Vinton County	5,053
Villages with water systems (by household)	Hamden (386), McArthur (785), Zaleski (85)
Total households in villages	1,256
Total rural households in Vinton County	3,797
Water Companies	Households Served:
Gallia County Rural Water	70
Leading Creek Conservatory District	374
Le-Ax Water Company	400
Jackson County Water Company	720
Ross County Water Company	500
Total rural households served by water companies:	2,064
Rural households without reliable water	1,733
Percent of rural households without reliable water:	46%
Percent of all households without reliable water:	34%
*Compiled November 2019 by the Vinton County Development Department.	

According to Wies, Mays, Collins, & Young, “water insecurity co-occurs with poverty and social and economic exclusion” (2020). The degradation of infrastructure combined with the growing economic disparity in the Appalachian region is cause for water issues in the area. Add a history of extractive industries and the region’s “sacrifice zone” (Wies, Mays, Collins, & Young, 2020) label to the mix and one can see the issue of water insecurity arise. Water infrastructure issues were additionally cited as the reason for a lack of other built capital stock in the area, including manufacturing and other employable units. The chart does not account for businesses in Vinton County and their lack of water infrastructure access. If 46% of rural households do not have access to reliable water, one can imagine the growth in the total number with the addition of businesses and industry located in the rural regions of the county. This is a

contributing factor to the overall economic issue of poverty in Vinton County and the wider Appalachian region.

The Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) was identified by multiple agencies in Vinton County as a substantial funder of built capital improvement initiatives. The CDBG Program is facilitated by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development and authorized by Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (CDBG, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CARES Act for the Community Development Block Grant Program gave additional assistance to communities by allocating funds for “housing-related activities, public improvements and facilities, and activities to acquire real property” (CDBG, 2021). Vinton County has utilized some of this funding to organize emergency heating and cooling grants for housing programs put in place by the Jackson-Vinton Community Action. The Vinton County Development Department spearheads rural broadband initiatives to expand access to reliable, high-speed internet across the county using funds from the ARC. The Development Department has also placed significant importance on improving the county water system, providing safe drinking water to rural areas of the county, and improving failing septic systems through grants from CDGB and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency.

Another significant piece of legislation that cannot be ignored is the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021, which houses the Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act Of 2021. The IIJA allocated an additional \$1 billion to ARC to provide funding for rural broadband, grant programs, and other projects funded through the Commission. Additional financial support to the Appalachian Regional Energy Hub Initiative and the Appalachian Development Highway System was allocated as well throughout the bill. Overall,

the word “Appalachian” is used 48 times in the entire 1,039-page document, mostly referencing ARC and its projects. However, when it comes to contents surrounding water infrastructure, the word “Appalachia” is not mentioned in those sections – although in general, funding is available for rural water initiatives in areas such as Vinton County and other Appalachian communities. An approximate \$55 billion in water infrastructure funding is available to rural communities within the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (H.R.3684 - 117th Congress, 2021). Another \$42.5 billion is dedicated to states to improve broadband infrastructure, with another \$22.5 billion going to programs such as the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, the Affordable Connectivity Fund, and the Digital Equity Act. Additionally, the IIA specifies that the Appalachian Regional Commission “may provide technical assistance, make grants, enter into contracts, or otherwise provide amounts to individuals or entities in the Appalachian region for projects and activities to increase affordable access to broadband networks throughout the Appalachian region” through the High-Speed Broadband Deployment Initiative (H.R.3684 - 117th Congress, 2021). These allocations written into the IIA have the potential to assist communities such as Vinton County only if state legislatures disperse funds equitably to rural communities.

Cultural

Cultural capital was identified by interviewees as a strong community capital in the area, this includes noting Appalachian heritage, “Viking Pride,” and the resident’s “willing to work” attitude. Historically, Vinton County possesses the “strong sense of place and community” that is so notable about Appalachian communities (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2021). Vinton County is full of history and is a popular spot for historical tourism and festivities, especially combined with the community’s respect and appreciation for nature. Vinton County provides

stability that families do not typically find in more urban areas. Family roots and a familiar culture provide those who know the area a stable, comfortable place to settle down and foster a positive, family-oriented attitude. The community also has a culture of resiliency, which was a trait most noted by all interviewees. Though the community lacks in financial capital, the community thrives in establishing a culture of support and encouragement during hard times. During COVID-19, community leaders pulled resources to allow for youth to have access to meals, internet, and help with their learning. Examples such as this are just one of many that exemplify the resiliency that Vinton County exuberates.

Vinton County possesses strong ties to the Appalachian subculture. Billings (1974) explores the idea of the Appalachian “culture of poverty” and its relationship to cultural lag, which refers to the idea that culture takes time to catch up with surrounding innovations (such as technology, new ideas, etc.). Billings reflects on Thomas Ford’s “The Passing of Provincialism” (1962) in which he explores the values of Appalachian culture. Here, he describes four key traits of Appalachian culture: individualism (self-reliance), traditionalism, fatalism, and religious fundamentalism. Denham (2015) explains that Appalachian people, although connected to their roots within the traditions of the region, do not ignore modernity, but may not embrace it. This can be observed in Vinton County, and other areas of the region, in most (if not all) community capitals. Observed examples of cultural lag in Vinton County include a strong adversity to mask wearing or vaccinating during the COVID-19 pandemic, fundamentalist religious beliefs that block progressive cultural shifts, and negative perceptions of higher education. The Appalachian “culture of poverty” relates to these characteristics heavily, as members of the community are uneasy about cultural shifts that could lead to economic disruption and change.

Financial

Financial capital was, most notably, the community capital that interviewees identified as most deficient in the area. When asked about poverty in the community, financial capital is the first community asset to come to mind. Reasons identified by community leaders for a lack of financial capital in the area are A) a lack in real estate tax revenue due to a lack of industry in the area, B) the taxes that are generated are based on land ownership rather than income, and C) median household income is significantly lower than the average cost of living for Ohio.

Several community leaders interviewed for this study noted the lack of industry in Vinton County, Ohio. Not only does this allow for a lack of jobs for community members, but it also allows for a lack of real estate tax that would generate income for the area. The Vinton County Development Department shared that the average commute time to work for community members is approximately 32 minutes, and a majority of those workers travel outside of the county to work. Ross, Athens, and Jackson counties employ the largest numbers of Vinton County residents, as well as large, traveling industries such as oil pipelining and construction (Vinton County Development Department, 2021).

The median value for a home in Vinton County is worth less than \$100,000.00 (Vinton County Development Department, 2021). The taxes generated to fund things like schools, roadways, etc. are based off the value of land owned by a person, rather than the income they generate. According to the Vinton County Commissioners, the taxable value of real property in the county is about \$161,832,340 (Holley, 2020). Some community leaders were quoted as saying this way of funding schools and services is “unconstitutional” and needs major adjustments to incur financial capital. Others interviewed for this study disagree, saying that the median annual income for Vinton County residents is too low, and taxing income even more

would bring “indescribable financial burdens to families across the county.” The median household income for Vinton County is \$45,673.00, which did rise about 8% since the last census (United States Census Bureau). One interviewee mentioned that the median household income in Vinton County is lower than the tuition rate for one of the private high schools the Vinton County girls’ basketball team played against in their history-making state tournament run last winter. The financial disparity that Vinton County residents are up against is observed by many, including those interviewed outside of the Vinton County community.

A representative from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) in Washington D.C. recognized Vinton County, Ohio as one of the region’s more impoverished counties. The ARC categorized counties based on economic status, best to worst being Attainment, Competitive, Transitional, At-Risk, and Distressed. For decades, Vinton County has been listed as a distressed county according to the ARC. In 2017, Vinton County moved from the distressed category to the at-risk category, and has maintained that position up to the present, signifying things are improving. In the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, most of the money was allocated to assist municipalities. In order to receive the relief, municipalities must request money for projects. Vinton county would have been eligible for approximately 2.5 million dollars and yet, out of 16 eligible municipalities, only four originally applied for relief. The ARC stated that “People are scrambling to figure out what to do with this money” and that in order to give relief funds, the federal government needs to educate, train, and provide resources to municipalities and the organizations that assist them on how to access and use the funds. Additionally, with funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 making their way to communities, more initiatives have the potential to be funded to completion if successfully accessed.

Human

Vinton County is the least populated county in the state of Ohio with a population of 13,620 people (Holley, 2020). Human capital in Vinton County is indicated by population (diversity of population, age range, average family size, etc.), educational attainment and quality of education, vocational and life skills, public health, and creative liberty within the community. Of the residents, 97.2% of the population is white, with 2.3% being two or more races, and 0.3% being African American (United States Census Bureau, 2019). According to community development professionals interviewed, this lack of diversity within the population can be attributed to the area's rural geography, as well as held biases and political beliefs that are overwhelmingly popular among residents, such as the overall lack of support for higher education. The local school district educates approximately 2,182 students each year with 156 full-time teachers within their five schools (three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school). The graduation rate is 91% with the majority of highest level of education attainment being a high school diploma (45.6% of the general population) (Holley, 2020).

“Rural brain drain” is a concept that development professionals in the area are acutely aware of. Rural brain drain is the out-migration of young, talented, and/or college-educated workers from rural areas (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Brain drain is caused by a variety of factors including economic disparity, cultural lag, and most notably, the pressure by communities for high-achieving young people to seek better opportunities. Oftentimes young achieving students find themselves influenced by educators, parents, and community members to leave their rural hometowns to seek higher education, higher paying jobs, and other opportunities. Although these are positive steps towards a developing economy and a successful human capital stock, oftentimes those who leave communities do not return (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Without the

additional investment in those who stay within the community, human capital is leeched by rural brain drain and is then stuck in an endless cycle of educational and economic inconsistency.

Those in leadership, including political and educational leaders, are working to improve educational settings and increase opportunities for people to gain an education in Vinton County. One way this is happening is the development of a branch campus of the University of Rio Grande in the village of McArthur. College Credit Plus (CCP) courses are available already in Vinton County at the dilapidated old high school building, but many students must travel 30-50 minutes out of the county to the main campus of Rio Grande or to the small Jackson location due to limited course offerings. A state-of-the-art branch campus will be built sometime in the near future, according to the Director of the McArthur location of the University of Rio Grande, in order to provide more course offerings and teach trade skills otherwise not taught inside the county. COVID-19 has affected the construction of the building, but once completed, the new location will be within walking distance from the Vinton County High School. Opportunities for Human Capital to grow in the area are arising with the development of new educational outlets, shedding light on the potential for putting the plug on brain drain in Vinton County.

Natural

Vinton County is very rich in natural capital and has been noted by interviewees as Vinton County's most abundant form of capital. Home to many who adore outdoor recreation and beautiful scenery, Vinton County's natural landscapes are an important part of the community. Currently, there are nine dedicated areas and/or facilities regarding state parks, forests, nature preserves, scenic waterways, and wildlife areas spanning a total of 48,090.50 acres (Holley, 2020). These areas include lakes Hope, Alma, and Rupert along with the watersheds of Raccoon Creek and Salt Creek. Vinton County is also home to part of the Wayne

National Forest as well as Zaleski State Forest, Richland Furnace State Forest, Tar Hollow State Forest, and Vinton Furnace State Forest. Many of these forests and parks are manmade and intentionally protected after the destruction of decades of coal mining and logging in the past (Parks and Recreation, 2016). Hundreds of historical locations dot the Vinton County landscape, such as covered bridges, Moonville Tunnel, and battle sites of Morgan's Raid. Wildlife preserves and dedicated hunting areas make up a large portion of Vinton County's recreational activities and relates to Vinton County's cultural capital through Appalachian heritage and outdoorsmen's sportsmanship.

In November of 2021, the Vinton County Park District was authorized and approved by the Vinton County Probate Judge and Ohio Revised Code. The Vinton County Park District will serve as Vinton County's steward for natural capital – providing protection, conservation, and education for Vinton County's natural, cultural, and historical aspects. The establishment of the new Park District will allow Vinton County to capitalize on its extensive natural resources and provide structure to community aspirations regarding tourism and environmental preservation.

Many interviewees mentioned Vinton County's history and dependency on extractive industries creates financial distress on the community. Currently, Vinton County is capitalizing on the popularity of wild game hunting by partnering with a local business, Superior Hardwoods, and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to provide the area hunting and wildlife exploration opportunities, as well as improve natural habitats and landscapes, through the Superior Wildlife Area and timber management (Parks and Recreation, 2016). Much of the land in Vinton County is sold to non-resident owners and was noted by interviewees becoming increasingly difficult to obtain by residents of the county. The local Parks District notes that land is being divided at an increasing rate, which is causing problems for conservation efforts. The

Parks District is working to establish more historical landmarks around the county and protect the area's natural landscapes.

Vinton County is also home to a large portion of the Hocking Hills region, and like Hocking County, is capitalizing on the beauty of the region to attract tourists. In fact, many of those visiting the Hocking Hills State Park choose to stay in cabins and rentals located in Vinton County (Parks and Recreation, 2016) as well as visit Vinton County parks and wildlife areas. With the addition of a newly renovated hotel and the establishment of the Vinton County Park District, county residents and visitors alike can explore the area with ease. Natural capital is Vinton County's most abundant asset and possesses ample opportunity for Vinton County to explore expanding and improving financial, political, and built community capitals.

Political

Political Capital in Vinton County reflects the community's power structure and population. Vinton County's villages are governed by town councils and a mayor, who in turn make up the township trustees and county trustees. Many political decisions are made at the county level – such as distribution of funds, the development of projects, and the passing of levies and laws. Not all decisions are made on behalf of village and township trustees, though there are programs in place to assist smaller government bodies as they apply for funding or request help for a project. These programs were noted by interviewees as especially helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic and the distribution of federal pandemic relief.

During COVID-19, a sum of \$2,541,608.00 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds were awarded to Vinton County municipalities (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2021; Vinton County Auditor, 2021). Unfortunately, not all townships and villages

passed a resolution to request the money. Out of 16 townships and villages, only Eagle and Wilkesville Townships, and the villages of McArthur, Hamden, and Zaleski, made the request for COVID-19 stimulus funds and received them. This reflects poorly on Vinton County's political capital, as many interviewees (such as local business owners) are now disappointed in their political leaders for not taking advantage of this one-time opportunity. According to the Vinton County Auditor's Office and the Vinton County Department of Development, the almost \$1 million dollars still available is currently being sought after, and the Development Department is working to assist local leaders in the application process.

Vinton County's political scene is quite small. The Vinton County Development Department measures how many registered voters there are within the county (8,435) and how many of those voters voted in the 2016 elections (3,386 or 40.1% of eligible voters) (Holley, 2020). Less than half of those eligible to vote voted in the 2016 election. Data from the 2020 election shows that Vinton County had a slightly higher turnout for the most recent presidential election with a total of 5,963 votes, 77% of which going to Republican candidate Donald J. Trump. Many of those who are in political power within the county have done so for several years, some even for decades (Personal Interview with Vinton County Development Department).

Social

Social Capital has been identified as one of Vinton County's more prominent and highly regarded forms of capital. According to Emery & Flora, social capital "reflects the connections among people and organizations or the social "glue" to make things, positive or negative, happen" (2006). Interviewees each identified social capital as one of Vinton County's best assets, citing Vinton County's "small town" feel as a means for both bridging and bonding social capital. A local business owner noted in their interview that, "Vinton County isn't just a county,

but a community” and shared that community members look out for one another. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when many small businesses struggled, they noted that many community members purposely supported their family businesses. Each noted in some way that in hard times, the community comes together to support one another, whether it be fundraising, religious prayer chains, or physical gatherings of support.

Social capital can also be seen in Vinton County by calculating attendance at community-wide events such as the local county fair, sporting events, fundraising benefits, and other social gatherings for the community’s benefit (West & The Vinton County Chamber of Commerce, 2016). Many noted that, similar to cultural capital, residents in the Vinton County community are brought together through good times and bad in order to show support to one another.

On the contrary, social capital was also noted as something that can limit Vinton County. Biases, held prejudices, and lack of communication among residents was noted by interviewees working in educational outlets in the county, and results in a lack of progressive community engagement and populations. This concept ties into political and human capitals in observance of educational attainment, political disposition, and lack of diversity within the county population.

Summary

How have COVID-19 and the federal stimulus bills affected poverty in Vinton County, Ohio?

There is not a singular project or organization in the Vinton County community network that is fighting specifically against “poverty” in the area. Poverty is a complex, multifaceted issue, which is comprised of many individual issues, such as affordable and safe housing, reliable income, educational attainment, the safety and security of children, and food insecurity, to name a few. The federal stimulus packages have given CBOs in Vinton County ample

opportunity to utilize federal dollars for community development initiatives. Some organizations have fully taken advantage of these dollars to fund safe water and housing projects, further service rural broadband initiatives, bring food service programs to families and children, and more. Other municipalities and CBOs, however, have not taken advantage of these opportunities, ultimately not improving poverty levels in the area.

Those taking small steps to improve the issue areas have seen improvements in the lives of those in poverty in Vinton County. Because most organizations had more funding for projects over the last year, many have seen a jump in program outreach and participation. No significant numbers have been released regarding how many Vinton County families were placed into poverty since March of 2020, although it is known that the pandemic financially displaced at least 8 million into poverty across the United States (Parolin, et al., 2020). Results from the 2020 United States Census, which would provide updated and accurate economic data for U.S. counties, have yet to be fully released as of December 30, 2021. The Census Bureau did report on September 14, 2021, that the 2020 national poverty rate had lowered to 9.1% from the previous year's 11.8% following the federal pandemic aide (United States Census Bureau, 2021).

In recent weeks, the Vinton County Development Department and the Vinton County Auditor's Office have worked to assist township trustees and other community leaders in requesting COVID-19 stimulus funding. Vinton County has received approximately \$2 million in federal relief funds and has not returned any of the money to the federal government for non-allocation (Vinton County Commissioners Office, 2021). Most of the money has been allocated to pay sick leave to employees who must quarantine because of COVID-19, personal protective equipment (PPE), office renovations to accommodate social distancing, as well as improvements to technology and the purchasing of necessary teleworking software. Overall, Vinton County has

“rolled with the punches” during the pandemic, and according to community leaders, “haven’t seen much change in poverty in the area” although national poverty levels have continued to rise and fall throughout 2020 and 2021.

How does local leadership affect decisions regarding poverty and aide distribution?

Many leaders in Vinton County “wear many hats” or hold multiple positions of power in the county. This is common in rural areas (Sharp, 2001) and has its own pros and cons to community development. As leaders involve themselves in more positions of power, their agendas become intertwined, and many organizations begin moving to solve the same singular issue. Although this allows for partnerships and collaboration amongst these boards, many lose sight of their original purpose and other pressing issues are left behind. Leaders who “wear too many hats” are also liable to be spread too thin between their responsibilities, leaving them to be burnt out, or abandon some of their responsibilities in the end. Some of the community leaders interviewed expressed these feelings and mentioned that they feel the responsibilities of Vinton County’s needs aren’t being addressed by everyone in the community and only a select few.

Many, if not a majority, of community leaders in Appalachian communities are working in occupations full-time in addition to serving their communities. Many volunteer their time to serve as trustees or within other public service positions. The area’s primary labor-based occupations and industries require long work hours, intense physical work, and can include lengthy commutes to and from the workplace. Many community leaders find themselves having to choose between providing necessities for their families or volunteering for the community. Many, if not all, cannot afford to choose volunteerism.

This phenomenon explains why Vinton County municipalities did not request federal stimulus money immediately. As community members also feeling the effects of the pandemic, these municipalities couldn't find the time, money, or resources to learn where to begin in requesting these funds. A representative from the Jackson-Vinton Community Action explained that "there are many steps to the process [of requesting federal assistance funding]. There should have been consultants and more assistance. It's not that Southern Ohio didn't utilize the money, it's that they couldn't." Although entities like ARC, OVRDC, and FAO offered training programs and help guides for stimulus funding applicants during the pandemic, many community leaders could not find the time between providing for their own families and searching for more immediate solutions to issues affecting their communities.

What organizations and leaders are identified within the community, and how do they bond and/or bridge social capital to aid the community?

The community organizations and leaders summarized below are those found to be most influential in the county's COVID-19 response, as well as their involvement in other various forms of community and asset development. These organizations, each tied together through various forms of capital, work to bond and/or bridge social capital in order to achieve the mission, vision, and goals of their organizations.

Vinton County OSU Extension

Vinton County Ohio State University (OSU) Extension is, at most, the center of much of the community development initiatives in Vinton County. The national Cooperative Extension System (CES), connected by the nation's land-grant universities, is an integral piece of the community development puzzle in the United States. The Ohio State University Cooperative

Extension Services provides important and necessary programming in the realms of agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, community development, and 4-H youth development. These four program areas are found in some capacity in each county of Ohio, facilitated by that county's OSU Extension office.

Vinton County OSU Extension finds itself in the center of the community network map drawn for Vinton County. The office's expertise and resources are used widely by all – the local school district, the local government, agricultural entities, businesses, families, and more. The VC OSU Extension office connects Vinton County throughout the state and offers expertise to locals in the realms of community and youth development. The Vinton County 4-H program, for example, has anywhere between 400-600 participants each year, although that number has declined recently due to the pandemic (Personal Communication with Vinton County OSU Extension, 2021). The Extension services in Vinton County are highly regarded and used by many.

Facilitated by the VC OSU Extension office, the Vinton County Future Focus Steering Committee develops the Vinton County Future Focus document, a “strategic vision to action plan that creates a working guideline for positive action in the Vinton County community” (Personal Communication with Vinton County OSU Extension, 2021). The first Future Focus document was written in 2000, with accreditation from the Ohio Department of Development for “having developed one of the first ‘White Papers,’ or strategic goals in the state” (Future Focus Steering Committee, 2016). This document has become influential in connecting leadership throughout the county and developing one focused vision to work towards together. The Future Focus document provides a structured, written out agenda that political leaders, business owners, educators, and more can all use as a shared tool for change.

During COVID-19, Vinton County OSU Extension provided resources to the community that detailed where community members could access food and shelter, healthcare (including COVID testing and vaccinations), financial literacy, and other important information. During the pandemic, the VC Extension Office redirected their attention to keeping youth connected with trusted adult mentors, developing lesson plans for socio-emotional struggles and virtual engagement, and focused on training volunteers to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect during pandemic virtual instruction.

The Vinton County Development Department/Vinton County Commissioners Office

The Vinton County Development Department also finds itself at the center of most, if not all, community development initiatives in Vinton County. A department of the Vinton County Commissioners Office, the Development Department seeks to source funding and action for various projects that benefit community development throughout the county. Recently, the Development Department has been working diligently to secure federal stimulus dollars to bring in county improvements and services. Many of these programs assist low-income families and individuals that qualify for direct-benefit programs.

The Vinton County Development Department and Vinton County Commissioners impact built capital the most through their political capital influence. Solving the water quality and access issue in Vinton County has been the top priority of the Commissioner's Office, with reliable rural broadband coming in second. So far, the Vinton County Commissioner's Office, in conjunction with the Development Department, has worked to secure grant funding for both projects from the state. From this grant funding, Vinton County will receive three towers to bring stronger internet connection to the county, as well as improved water infrastructure to the Wilkesville (Union Ridge) area.

The Jackson-Vinton Community Action, Inc.

The Jackson-Vinton Community Action, Inc. (JVCAI) receives funding from the Community Development Block Grant Program to issue community development programs to the areas of Jackson and Vinton counties. JVCAI puts on program such as the Head Start preschool program, transportation services for the disabled and elderly, and even utility crisis payment plans. Their summer and winter crisis programs that provide weatherization such as heating and cooling systems, insulation, and roofing to low-income homeowners. JVCAI also supports the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) which, in Vinton County, is in conjunction with the Vinton County Health Department. A total of 18 members make up the Jackson-Vinton Community Action Inc. Board of Trustees, nine being from Jackson County and nine from Vinton County. There are three members from each sector; private, public, and low-income that work together to make decisions for the area. During the pandemic, the Jackson-Vinton Community Action, Inc. received approximately \$2 million dollars in federal COVID-19 relief to continue these programs.

The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio

The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO) services the Appalachian region of Ohio and its approximately 2 million residents. Established in 1998, the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio incubates community foundations like the Jackson-Vinton Community Action in order to support community development initiatives in Appalachian Ohio. Focusing on funding and charitable donor support, FAO seeks to provide grant dollars and financial support to community projects in the area.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, FAO launched their own COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund, which gave over \$400,000 to organizations in the region for their needs. Through this independently funded program, FAO supported over 150 nonprofits through grants of various sizes. In partnership with Facebook and T-Mobile, FAO launched a program to get internet hotspots in Southeast Ohio – Vinton County being a recipient of this program. FAO did not directly receive federal COVID-19 relief, and instead, met with state officials (including the Governor’s Office of Appalachia) to encourage an equitable disbursement of funds to the region. FAO pitched ideas to the state of Ohio to improve infrastructure, specifically rural broadband, to assist with educational and healthcare during the pandemic.

The Appalachian Regional Commission

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), although located in Washington D.C., cannot be left out of Vinton County’s network. The Appalachian Regional Commission is an economic partnership established between the federal government and the state governments of the 13 states of the Appalachian region. Serving over 400 counties in the Appalachian region of the United States, ARC looks to “build community capacity and strengthen economic growth to help the Region achieve socioeconomic parity with the nation” (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ARC funded a record number of projects in Appalachian communities. These projects mostly assisted counties with how to obtain COVID relief, such as grant-writing workshops, application review services, and general brainstorming on how municipalities could use the funds. Each county is in need of similar things, according to the Appalachian Regional Commission – rural broadband, infrastructure, small business development, and the promotion of tourism and/or other opportunities in the area. The

Appalachian Regional Commission provides oversight to Ohio's Governor's Office of Appalachia and supports capacity building projects in Appalachian Ohio through this partnership.

The Governor's Office of Appalachia

The Governor's Office of Appalachia (GOA) was established to "represent the interests of the Appalachian region in state government, uniting, assisting, and representing Appalachian Ohio" (Governor's Office of Appalachia, 2021). GOA is the state arm of the Appalachian Regional Commission and oversees Ohio's regional development districts, including the Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission (OVRDC). The Governor's Office of Appalachia serves as a liaison between ARC and the local development districts such as OVRDC, which services Vinton County.

Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission (OVRDC)

The Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission (OVRDC) is one of four regional arms of the Governor's Office of Appalachia that service the Appalachian Region of Ohio. Along with the Buckeye Hills Regional Council, the Eastgate Regional Council of Governments, and the Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association, OVRDC coordinates federal, state, and local resources to further development in the Southern and Southeast regions of Ohio.

During the pandemic, OVRDC provided the region technical support to assist in teleworking and online learning. OVRDC made it a priority to seek out partnerships that could support special projects in the area, secure funding, and provide resources. OVRDC's small team of just 10 employees relies on social capital and the connectedness of the areas businesses, human capital, and outside organizations to accomplish their mission.

Ohio Southeast Economic Development

Ohio Southeast Economic Development, formerly known as the Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth, is the Jobs Ohio regional partner for the Southern and Eastern region of Ohio. Ohio Southeast supports businesses and industries in the area that bring economic growth to the region by leveraging public and privatized incentives. In short, Ohio Southeast wants to help businesses in Southeast Ohio, including Vinton County, grow.

Ohio Southeast works directly with the Vinton County Development Department providing SWAT analyses and partnership directives. Ohio Southeast was noted as the “boots on the ground” for economic development in Southeast Ohio and aids businesses in the form of resources and incentives, engagement and partnerships, communication and connections, foreign direct investment, and talent attraction and retention resources.

VC Local Schools

The Vinton County Local School District is Vinton County’s sole school district. It is a common theme, even before COVID-19, to see students who live in Vinton County to go to out-of-county schools or complete homeschooling programs. This is a small portion (around 8.5%) of students living in Vinton County who attribute long bus routes, religious beliefs, and parents who also work out of county to their schooling decisions.

The Vinton County Local School District is Vinton County’s prime example of community. The local school system is very much supported by the community, and in return, it supports the community back. The Vinton County Local School District is a successful school, with a graduation rate of 88% and 51% of graduates enrolling in college programs. Vinton

County High School provides AP and CCP classes and focuses on career tech programs for students interested in the workforce after graduation.

The Vinton County Local School District was affected deeply during the pandemic as schools closed in March of 2020 and students in Vinton County were sent home to do online learning. The Vinton County Local School District kept employees working and students fed by providing meal services to students in need. The Vinton County Local School District created its own online learning program and worked with other programs to get Wi-Fi hotspots distributed throughout the county. Vinton County Local Schools used the federal pandemic aide they received to purchase PPE, water, technology for virtual education, a new HVAC system to bring in clean and safe air, and lastly, busses and bussing improvements. Now, the school district is looking to hire additional staff to address academic gaps caused by the disparities brought about during the pandemic.

VC Health Department

Lastly, the Vinton County Health Department has aided the community in most notable ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Vinton County Health Department responded to all of Vinton County's 2,045 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 46 confirmed COVID-19 related deaths. The Vinton County Health Department has worked throughout the pandemic to provide educational and medical outreach to the Vinton County community. The Vinton County Health Department continues to provide information to the public and public officials on the COVID-19 pandemic and advise community members and leaders on healthy living. The Vinton County Health Department continues to provide COVID-19 vaccines at their walk-in vaccine clinic.

The Vinton County Health Department was awarded the Creating Healthy Communities grant through the Ohio Department of Health in 2020. Throughout the pandemic, the Vinton County Health Department has worked to establish new and renovated public spaces to encourage outdoor play and healthy living, including the adoption of the Complete Streets policy, the renovation of the Wyman Park and addition of bike racks in McArthur village. The Vinton County Creating Healthy Communities program also encourages access to healthy foods through healthy vending policies within local businesses and supporting the Vinton County Farmers' & Crafters' Market.

The Vinton County Health Department is one of few healthcare providing facilities in Vinton County. The closest urgent care, hospital, dentist, and ophthalmologist are approximately 30-35 minutes out of county. There is one small behavioral health facility in McArthur Village, and a small private physical therapy center in the county. Accessible healthcare in Vinton County is a barrier many community members face and directly correlates with high rates of poverty in the area.

Conclusions

Although the economic impact of the pandemic on Vinton County and other Appalachian communities is not yet entirely known, it was concluded that infrastructure is a leading cause of poverty in Vinton County, specifically water and broadband infrastructure, in which the pandemic drastically highlighted. Although it was financial capital identified by interviewees as Vinton County's most deficient asset, both assets are interdependent and cause strain on community development in the county. It costs money to build and repair infrastructure, a capital scarcely found in Vinton County without the assistance of grant dollars oftentimes given to communities with less costly projects. Conclusions raised the argument that local leadership in

small, rural communities such as Vinton County is aging and overwhelmed, causing strain on asset distribution and allocation. CBOs inside and connected to Vinton County were already benefitting from bonding and bridging social capital pre-pandemic to accomplish shared missions, visions, and goals, and during the pandemic, many CBOs focused on making an impact in ways they knew how, and oftentimes found themselves “going in circles” with the same set of leading organizations. CBOs not associated with the community network have the ability to bridge social capital to additional organizations using the provided map to accomplish said visions, spreading the load of development work across the community network and not a specific set of leading organizations.

Policy Recommendations

Recommendations for new and/or adjusted policies to assist with community development in Vinton County, and the further Appalachian region, are a necessary next step in assisting the area to grow. Policy recommendations are as follows:

1. Extended financial and political support for the Appalachian region, ARC, GOA, OVRDC, and other boards impacting Appalachian development.
2. Addressing the narrative that poverty, water quality issues, food insecurity, etc. are solely issues in third-world countries, when in fact, are found right here in U.S. Appalachian communities.
3. Infrastructure bills that specifically target rural broadband and improved water infrastructure in Appalachian communities, as well as the upkeep and maintenance of this new infrastructure.

4. Lastly, sustainable initiatives are associated with job loss in Appalachia. To combat the climate crisis, create healthy communities, and encourage sustainable development, policies need to be put into place to protect Appalachian workers and economic development in the region.

Research Recommendations

Additional recommendations to fill gaps in research include additional, more in-depth, studies as to how COVID-19 has specifically impacted the Appalachian region, its population, and municipalities, as well as the Appalachian region of Ohio. Data on Southeast Ohio counties, and Appalachian Ohio counties, is scarce and requires more attention if the area is to be served. When looking for data on Vinton County specifically, one can find articles about the area's geography and history. Economic and developmental data is scarce, hard to find, not digitized, and spread out among community organizations.

Study Challenges

Challenges faced in this study have been mostly related to a lack of response from organization leaders and a lack of current data on the financial repercussions of COVID-19. Due to COVID-19, there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding how it is affecting communities and many do not want to participate in something they think they do not have the answers to. Vinton County has previously been the target of various studies of poverty, food insecurity, high unemployment, and other various forms of "bad press." Leaders of several organizations declined to participate due to their involvement in past projects that "reflected poorly on Vinton County." Vinton County is not a traditionally studied county. This study is one of the first to have focused solely on the Vinton County area. The lack of data surrounding Vinton County, and

even Southeast Appalachian Ohio, posed a challenge for before, during, and after the pandemic data retrieval.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Vinton County, Ohio Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

General Information

1. Please give a brief description of what your organization/business does and what you do within that organization/business.
2. Who does your organization/business serve?
3. What activities and/or services does your organization/business provide the community?
4. How is your organization/business managed?
5. How is your organization/business funded?
6. What other organizations/businesses do you partner with to accomplish your mission? Why/How do you partner with them?

Business Ownership/Organizational Leadership

7. What was it like to own a business or be a part of your organization in Vinton County before the pandemic? (Feel free to provide a timeline of business ownership that includes opening, any recessions, highs, lows, etc.)
8. How has the pandemic affected your business or organization?
9. Have you received any stimulus relief on behalf of your business/organization? If so, how have you used it?
10. How has the pandemic and business ownership/organizational leadership affected you personally? (Social relationships, etc.)
11. What do you think needs to happen to help local businesses in the area?
12. As a community leader, how actively involved are you in your community? Why or why not?
13. What else should I know about owning a business in the Vinton County area?

Community Leader Identification

14. Who else do you identify as a leader in Vinton County, or as someone who influences Vinton County in both positive and negative ways? You may list as many people as you can think of.
15. What organization are these leaders associated with? What does that organization do? Is it linked to your organization in any way?

Communities can be described in terms of their Economic, Built, Cultural, Social, Political, Human, and Natural assets.

16. What do you believe to be Vinton County's greatest asset? Why?
17. What do you believe to be Vinton County's most deficient asset? Why?
18. What do you think Vinton County can do to solve these issues?

My research is focusing on poverty in relation to COVID-19 and the federal stimulus bills in Vinton County. Please answer these questions thinking about what you know of poverty in Vinton County in its relation to poverty and financial advancement.

19. How do you see poverty affect your community, work, and/or other aspects of your life?
20. What do you see as a primary contributor to poverty in Vinton County?
21. What are your thoughts on the federal stimulus package and its impact on poverty in the area?
22. How did your business/organization use any stimulus funds you received, if any, to improve upon the lives of others in the community?
23. What organizations and programs can you identify within the area that help combat poverty and/or the assets you described that need improved in the area?
24. What else should I know about Vinton County and leaders in the area to best further my research?

CBOs organized/housed outside of Vinton County, Ohio with a regional focus that encompasses the County:

1. In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic affected Appalachian communities?
2. What sort of aide do you provide Appalachian communities? (If you have provided aide to Vinton County, Ohio, what sort and why?)
3. What makes Appalachia special? What about Appalachia could be improved?
4. What do you see as a primary contributor to poverty in Appalachia?
5. How has your organization been impacted by COVID-19 and the federal stimulus packages?

Appendix B

Indicators for Community Capitals

1. Human – Indicators include population (diversity of population, age range, average family size, etc.), educational attainment and quality of education, vocational and life skills, public health, and creative liberty within the community.
2. Political – Indicators include community involvement in political affairs and actions that benefit the community overall, as well as community access to leadership, organizations, and resources that establish a communal voice.
3. Financial – Indicators include communal wealth available to be invested into the community for its own benefit, as well as individual wealth (such as average household income, grant funding to specific programs, etc.) and COVID-19 funds.
4. Social – Indicators include both “bridging” and “bonding” social capital. Indicators for bridging social capital include the relationships between organizations or community leaders to coordinate community relief and structured services. These connections are loosely connected and are indicated so on the community network map. An indication of bonding social capital refers to the close connections between community members, organizations, businesses, etc. (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic).
5. Cultural – Indicators include communal traditions, language, heritage, etc. that create a community’s culture. Other indicators include community knowledge and understanding of

outside cultural norms, leadership's influence on cultural capital, and who has opportunities within the community to express their voice and influence in the area.

6. Built – Indicators of built capital include the number of sound, functional, and safe public and/or private physical spaces in the area, as well as those that are dilapidated or abandoned. Built capital indicates the availability for physical support for community development.

7. Natural – According to Emery & Flora, “natural capital refers to those assets that abide in a particular location, including weather, geographic isolation, natural resources, amenities, and natural beauty. Natural capital shapes the cultural capital connected to place” (2006). Natural capital indicates the health of the community in the natural world.