



URBAN, RURAL AND REGION - Same difference?

Community asset based regeneration: useful lessons from different settings



This paper is a summarised report of a Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum seminar aimed at sharing experience and ideas in differing regeneration contexts.

The seminar took place in The Dewars Centre, Perth on Tuesday November 7th 2006.

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1 EVENT SUMMARY

PURPOSE:

To examine the comparable challenges and approaches in community asset based regeneration in rural, urban and regional cross border settings.

FORMAT:

A short day seminar, consisting of presentations from key speakers and an exchange of views and comments in a plenary panel session.

INTENDED OUTCOME:

- **Better awareness** of the opportunities for improving community asset based regeneration policy and practice in different settings.
- **Improved understanding and networking** between key players and agencies.
- A paper drawing out the **key messages** of the discussions and any recommendations for improving the sharing of experience and shaping of better policy and practice.
- **Specific recommendations** to discuss further with regeneration policy figures.

KEY SPEAKERS:

- **Derek Williams**, Policy Development and Communications Manager for Scotland at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- **Jackie Killeen**, Head of Policy and Strategy at the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland
- **Tom Warburton**, Head of Regeneration at One NorthEast
- **Chris Higgins**, Head of Enterprising Communities Team in the Strengthening Communities group of Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- **Alasdair McKinlay**, Head of Community Engagement at Communities Scotland

2 SEMINAR CONTEXT – SURF, BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF) is the independent regeneration and inclusion network, sharing information and promoting discussion so as to help shape, policy, opinion and the delivery of successful regeneration efforts in Scotland.

It does this by:

- Organising conferences, seminars, open forums, study visits and lectures
- Publishing the quarterly journal Scotregen as well as reports and briefing notes
- Organising an annual Regeneration Best Practice Awards scheme
- Facilitating informal 'Food For Thought' regeneration policy discussions with key players across different sectors
- Working closely with key policy makers.

SURF utilises its position as a truly independent forum for its wide membership to explore current practice and experience. Through its close links with the Scottish Executive and its agencies SURF acts as a constructive channel for information, consultation and policy proposals based on the knowledge and experience of its membership and the wider networks it connects with. In order to maximise the impact of its available resources SURF retains a distinctly Scottish urban focus. However, it also seeks to develop co-operative links with partners and networks operating in different regeneration settings.

In the case of this seminar:

- The Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum and Highland and Islands Enterprise agreed to work together to examine and learn from the different approaches to comparable regeneration challenges in rural and urban regeneration settings.
- SURF's links with the English Regional Development Agency 'One North East' brings the UK/devolved Scotland dimension that SURF is committed to exploiting to learn more of what works where and why.
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is interested in exploring further the potential for sharing ideas and approaches to community asset based regeneration particularly in the Urban/Rural and English/Scottish dimensions. Their support helps SURF strengthen the link between the seminar outcomes and the wider policy making process.
- The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland has substantial resources to invest in community asset building. This input and support could be a significant catalyst for more successful and extensive community based regeneration.
- Communities Scotland is responsible for supporting the delivery of Scottish Executive policy towards effective community regeneration. It has a range of initiatives and funding streams aimed at enhancing community participation in regeneration strategy development and delivery.

3 SEMINAR CONTENT – LESSONS IN ABCD

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is an established area of interest and related regeneration activity across the country and internationally. It is generally accepted that different approaches are appropriate for different settings and that locally sensitive solutions are required to meet the particular circumstances, culture and economic/political climate of distinct areas. However, in following this orthodoxy we may be missing some of the consistencies that can apply across the board, and more importantly, some of the experiential lessons that could be usefully shared in

differing settings. This seminar was aimed at exploring some of these consistencies and lessons.

The key messages from this event may be summarised as:

- Asset based community development is increasingly accepted as a viable and effective approach to building community capacity and confidence regardless of place.
- However, there are key decisions to be made about scale and levels of activity. Asset based development can be approached at a strategic or local level, but public assets utilised for one are not then available for the other.
- The empowerment of communities and individuals through acquiring and developing assets has extensive benefits for society well beyond the better or more effectively targeted management of local services and resources.
- Place is significant in terms of the cultural attitude of communities and in terms of what communities might consider are valuable assets to own.
- There are important lessons on the impact of culture, context and methods to be shared across the differing geographical and administrative systems in rural, urban and English regional settings
- The enthusiasm of an asset holder to dispose of that asset is a reasonable guide as to the wisdom of accepting it. It is therefore important that communities are already sufficiently skilled or supported in the assessment, planning and negotiating processes.
- Further investment in basic community development will be required if an asset building approach is to be a viable option for more marginalised groups.

4 MAIN POINTS FROM THE KEY SPEAKERS

1) Derek Williams of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) introduced the seminar. In the course of his welcoming and context setting remarks, Derek made the following points:

- As one of the largest investors in social research in the UK, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has a longstanding record of support for the work of SURF.
- It does so because it values the opportunities SURF provides to link the views and experience of different sectors and players in a holistic approach to regeneration.

- JRF has a particular interest in sustainable communities. The outcome of much of the research it has funded across the UK has consistently indicated the importance of effective community involvement in successful regeneration efforts. The response from politicians and practitioners to this research outcome is usually, 'Yes, but how?'
- Recent JRF research into the obstacles to community participation in regeneration has highlighted some very good examples of community based asset building; for example, in Renton.
- One of the less expected outcomes of the JRF Scottish Issues Seminar, in September 2005, was the need to do more to share lessons across urban and rural regeneration experience. JRF support for today's seminar is a response to that need.
- JRF is also keen to use events like today's to examine what can be learned in the continuing efforts to link issues and outcomes to transition of place and accountability.

2) Jackie Killeen made a presentation outlining why the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland are investing substantially in community asset based regeneration and what hopes it has for the outcome of this investment. In the course of her presentation Jackie made the following points

- The Big Lottery believes that community asset based regeneration is a route to releasing the considerable potential of communities and individuals to move from involvement in their future to a significant degree of control over it.
- Community based initiatives are an effective antidote to the increasingly atomised nature of our consumer based society.
- Environmental projects aimed at improving the appearance of an area tend to be very effective in bringing people together initially.
- Essential community services can be more effectively run by community organisations as they tend to be more aware of, and sensitive to, local needs and circumstances.
- Significant successes have already been achieved in health and food initiatives, renewable energy, and access to key services like transport.
- The Lottery funded Scottish Land Fund, managed by HIE, produced some impressive results. It is now time to make a leap of faith in translating the lessons and practice in an urban context.
- The Big Lottery wishes to be active investment partners, and in doing so to buy results rather than activities. It wants to move away from

supporting community projects to engaging in the overall livelihood of a community.

Jackie went on to outline the extent and approach of the new Community Asset Building Fund which will be delivered in partnership with HIE.

She concluded with some questions

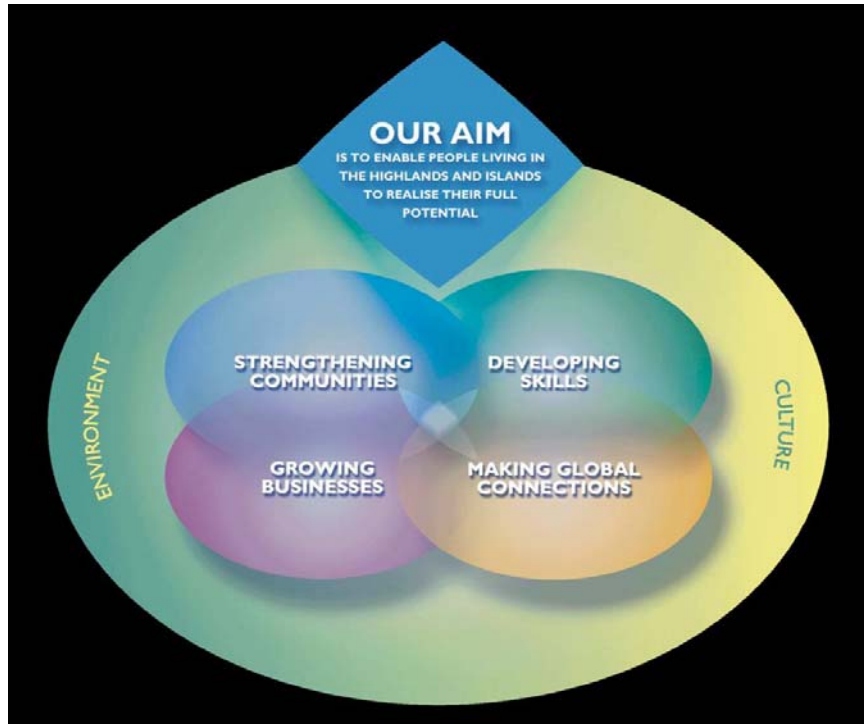
- Can Gigha happen in Glasgow?
- Can we invert the power relationships in communities?
- Is the giving and taking of power a zero sum game?
- Can we spot the assets from the liabilities?

3) Chris Higgins of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) made a presentation reviewing the importance of place in asset based regeneration strategies. In doing so he made the following points:

- Now is a good time to review what makes 'rural' distinctive in terms of approaches to regeneration in view of:
 - ▶ The salience of the city regions debate, both in Scotland by Scottish Enterprise and in England amongst the framework of Regional Development Agencies.
 - ▶ The multiplicity of Scottish Executive interests emerging in the rural agenda:
 - ◆ Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department through the Rural Development Regulations
 - ◆ The Scottish Executive's Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department through Highland and Islands Enterprise
 - ◆ The Scottish Executive Development Department through Communities Scotland and the Regeneration statement
 - ▶ HIE's 2005 strategy 'Smart Successful Highlands and Islands':
 - ◆ Main aim: realising potential of the people living in the H&I
 - ◆ Objective: Growing businesses
 - ◆ Objective: Developing skills
 - ◆ Objective: Global connections
 - ◆ Objective: Strengthening communities, *which we do by*
 - Acquiring community assets
 - Building capacity
 - Culture and heritage
 - ◆ The 'Nest' concept is the backdrop against which we have to do the above (see diagram on page 7)
 - Culture
 - Environment
 - The duality and interdependence of the two

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- ▶ Assets in more detail
 - ◆ Physical
 - Historic – toys for playgroups and upwards
 - Community land unit
 - Growing Community Assets
 - HIE's study of the valuation of community assets, which is on the HIE website (www.hie.co.uk)
 - ◆ Intangible – we recognise and accept the McKnight ABCD approach* but prefer to deal with intangibles such as capacity

* Does ABCD deliver social justice? Report link - <http://www.iacdglobal.org/documents/reports/rpt082006DoesABCDdeliverFinalPrint.pdf>

▶ So what?

- ▶ From inception the Scottish Executive focused on:
 - ◆ Social exclusion
 - ◆ Social inclusion
 - ◆ Social justice
 - ◆ HIE has been involved in all these, from the rural (and remote) point of view, and our conclusions were that:
 - Problems seem the same
 - Solutions seem very different and this is the key point

- In what way different?
 - ▶ Bad news: It is always going to be more expensive to deliver services in rural (and remote) areas because of the higher unit costs: more distance to travel to deliver to fewer people
 - ▶ Good news: There is often more flexibility in delivery, because the greater residual social capital in rural areas means that rural communities are more
 - ◆ Able to be involved
 - ◆ Willing to be involved
 - ◆ Experienced in being involved (through historic self reliance through self provision)
 - ◆ Entrepreneurial

4) Alasdair McKinlay outlined the range of measures Communities Scotland has in place to support asset based approaches to community regeneration. His further input included the following points:

- Registered Social Landlords in Scotland account for 260,000 homes. This represents considerable accumulated experience, capacity and collateral.
- Additionally, their professionally managed and regulated status makes RSLs a very stable, attractive base for further investment.
- Over half of all RSLs are already involved in wider regeneration activities.
- Audit Scotland reports have noted the increased degree of post stock transfer satisfaction amongst tenants of RSLs arising from improved services and an enhanced sense of involvement and control.
- £11M of the FutureBuilders investment fund, managed by Communities Scotland and intended to assist the growth of the social economy, was directed to organisations developing assets.
- Communities Scotland is very interested in the Big Lottery Fund Growing Community assets programme and has been speaking with BLF about how it can benefit the most disadvantaged areas
- Communities Scotland has developed a new programme focused on increasing the capacity of smaller less developed community organisations to own assets. This will complement the BLF programme
- The Community Development Trust model is relatively well developed in England. In Scotland this approach has taken off more in rural areas.
- Communities Scotland has supported Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS) to expand its work in the Scottish urban context.

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- The Scottish Executive is developing further guidance for Local Authorities on the disposal of public sector land at less than market value.
- More community development work needs to be done to build the capacity for taking on asset building at a local scale
- Strong links with Social Economy partnerships need to be further developed along with more national development work.

Finally, Alasdair offered some thoughts on 'What Works':

- **RSLs and particularly locally owned housing associations.**
- These are well placed to act as catalysts in wider community asset development. Some additional support in links and legal/financial advice would increase the rate of development.
- **Broad community buy in to the asset development plans.**
- **Supportive public sector partners such as Local Authorities and Health Boards.**
- These are important if the process of community asset building is to flourish but given other dynamics, this is an area of potential controversy.
- **A business like approach on the part of RSLs and Community Trusts.**
- This needs to include a viable revenue stream to support capital developments and a good grasp of technical challenges.
- **An appreciation of the implications of differences in scale.**
- **Getting away from a prevailing focus on acquiring buildings and towards developing appropriate local services.**

5) **Tom Warburton** outlined the structure and statutory role of the 8 Regional Development Agencies in the English regeneration context. He went on to describe the challenging physical, economic and social geography of the area and communities covered by One NorthEast (ONE), which was established in 1999. In the course of his presentation he noted the following points:

- ONE manages a budget of £250m/annum, the highest per capita spend of all the RDA's.
- Given the scale of difficulties it faces ONE is working hard towards being average in terms of English regional economic performance.

- ONE's Regional Economic Strategy is aimed at increasing economic participation and productivity. This involves creating up to 73,000 jobs and 22,000 new businesses by 2016.
- ONE's principal roles are:
 - ▶ Economic development
 - ▶ Economic Inclusion, particularly tackling barriers to labour market participation
- ONE's geographical remit covers a wide range of scales of conurbations requiring differing approaches. For example it is currently working on an appropriate strategy for the regeneration of the smaller market towns.
- In terms of Community assets vehicles ONE is supporting
 - ▶ Local Development Trust (particularly in rural settlements)
 - ▶ Some enterprise assets vehicles
 - ▶ Special Purpose Vehicles/ Local Asset Backed Investment vehicles
 - ▶ Private leverage vehicles using public owned assets or cash
- It is also exploring the potential of Community Interest Companies

In concluding his presentation, Tom raised the question of what geographical level offers the optimum gains from asset transfer and development - Neighbourhood, Local, City Regional, Regional, Northern?

If all existing assets are built into large scale strategic partnership initiatives what scope is there for community development through local asset based regeneration, and vice versa.

N.B. Copies of the presentation slides used by the above speakers (except Chris Higgins who spoke without slides) are available from the SURF web site at <http://www.scotregen.co.uk/knowledge/events.asp?sid=4>

5 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

During the open discussion in the question and answer session following the formal presentations, the following points were made:

- The issue of community assets goes far beyond social housing. Assets in disadvantaged areas are often better used by organisations with a developed community 'ethos' as compared to those in more standard public and private ownership.
- Easterhouse was contrasted with Gigha to highlight what different communities might consider to be useful community assets. Gigha is a small island community with clear boundaries and a population of 150 whereas Easterhouse is home to over 40,000 and is made up of a complex collection of neighbourhoods.

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- There are significant rural/urban differences which mean that we cannot always easily transfer successful rural experiences to cities and towns. These are sometimes about attitudes and expectations and sometimes about the practical requirements and priorities of differing communities. Glaswegian communities could feel equally passionate about acquiring land for community use as rural dwellers. However, realising such aspirations would require political courage and high levels of investment.
- There was a view that land is the ultimate community asset for both urban and provincial settings but it is important to be clear when talking about land ownership in urban communities. Does this mean ownership of the whole neighbourhood including houses and roads?
- A great deal of importance should be placed on where the driver is for community asset-led regeneration. It is often the case that community/enterprise centres are ‘pushed on’ communities and begin to fail after a few years when revenue streams start to dry up. Having members of the community behind the identification and management of community-owned assets is key.
- The Big Lottery Fund could support Glasgow communities seeking to acquire assets in certain circumstances. A cultural shift in which the community takes more responsibility for being enterprising would encourage wider recognition of the potential of community asset building.
- There are instances in which regional development alliances including those like One North East were keen to enter into joint ventures with local communities. In a profit sharing arrangement the RDA would retain ownership of the asset, thus preserving its community ownership in the widest sense. This may present a good alternative to the sale of public assets into private hands.
- Discussion moved to the benefit of community assets over Local Authority ownership. In this context the necessity of using public money to support community organisation acquiring community assets from bodies which represent them and which they already pay for was questioned. The point being that communities buying assets from the local council are essentially “buying back what is already theirs”.
- The degree of meaningful involvement, ownership and accountability and what arises from this in terms of wider benefits was proposed as being what makes this worthwhile. It was noted that there are circumstances in which local communities feel removed from ownership of assets held by local authorities.
- It was also noted that it is easy to see who the “bad guys” are when a community attempts asset purchase from feudal lairds. This is not the

case when dealing with public organisations. The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland would not support such a purchase unless there was clear demonstration that both the community and public organisation would benefit from the deal.

- In many cases community ownership is not always the right answer. There are many examples in which the community works closely with its local authority in order to turn around under-performing assets. Sharing of ‘aspirations’ rather than assets can often be a more productive mindset.
- Emphasis should be placed on public-owned assets being made viable and accessible without necessarily being drawn into community ownership. The vehicle owning the community asset must be accountable to the community. If not, then there is a case for transfer.
- It is also important not to overlook the private sector, which plays a key role in a number of the most deprived communities in Scotland.
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and other organisations, often advise communities not to buy certain assets for the very reason that full community ownership is “not the only game in town”. When a community asset is transferred we must look at the driver. It is more desirable if the acquirer is the driving force than the disposer. Often this is the difference is between a community asset and a liability
- One further hindrance to the transfer of assets to the community is that it can be very complicated to even find out who owns existing assets.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS - SHARED LESSONS

The chairperson for the seminar, SURF Chief Executive Andy Milne, thanked everyone for their frank and constructive inputs. He concluded the discussions with his summary of the main points.

It is clear from the discussions that place, or more specifically the physical, social and economic aspects of a place, as well as its geography, culture, history, traditions and prevailing political climate will be important in the selection and delivery of appropriate regeneration strategies. This is consistent with the Cultural Planning approach that SURF has been supporting in cooperation with others in the National Cultural Planning Steering Group over the last two years (see www.ncpsg.org).

Nonetheless, within the understanding that place is a crucial element, there is much that can be shared from accumulated experience and across the geographical and administrative settings considered in the seminar. The description and discussions of the approaches taken to community asset based regeneration have illustrated the 'same difference' in the regeneration challenges faced.

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- Asset building can be described as a means to develop independent resources and in the process re engage individuals and communities with wider societal structures and processes.
- The approach offers significant potential benefits for the democratic process. It need not represent a challenge to local authority democracy but rather a means of invigorating it, particularly in view of the widely perceived hollowing out of the democratic participative bodies that once provided fertile ground for emerging civic leadership and a developmental route to statutory political participation e.g. trade unions, co operatives church groups, mutual societies and membership based political parties themselves.
- Housing Associations are frequently identified as examples of well regulated, community asset based organisations, and as such they can be key drivers for wider action in regeneration. This may be in a catalytic role rather than direct action.
- In this respect they can be seen as the important ‘Anchor’ organisations with vital skills, experience and resources for supporting broader community capacity building and innovation. In many communities the scale of their community owned collateral will be a crucial element for further community activity and innovation.
- However, it is necessary here to make a distinction between large scale RSLs and truly local Housing associations.
- Housing Associations and other community asset based organisations tend to develop individual and community confidence through experiential learning, managing staff, resources, planning, budgeting, negotiating, team work, social skills- all employer priorities.
- The development of locally owned asset based organisations also offers a route from grant dependency to greater financial sustainability for some core community elements of independent representation and activity.
- However, not all services/facilities are appropriate for community ownership – don’t look for extremes – there are enough opportunities and problems to keep everyone busy. The answer is most likely to come from accurately defining the task and choosing the right tool for the job.
- Asset based community development will not of itself redress the balance of power and decision making inferred in the concept of ‘double devolution’. It may though greatly assist in building the skills and frameworks to allow more meaningful devolution of decision making to communities.

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- If this is to be a realistic goal some significant and sustained investment in basic community development work will first be required to enable the most marginalised communities and individuals to get more engaged in the management of their own lives and futures
- All of this area of debate is dependent on major policy decisions at a macro level to address the dangerous and expanding gap between those with power and resources and those without. Involvement in developing community asset can only be built on solid foundations of the basic necessities.

Andy indicated this is an important aspect of regeneration activity that SURF will continue to engage with in its ongoing role of linking varied views and experiences to developing policies and practice.

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The Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum is grateful to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for their support in the organisation of this seminar

7 APPENDIX: MAIN PARTNERS – key roles and contacts

Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF)

The Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum is the independent regeneration and inclusion network, sharing information and promoting discussion so as to help shape, policy, opinion and the delivery of successful regeneration efforts in Scotland.

SURF utilises its position as a truly independent forum for its cross sectoral membership to explore current practice and experience. Through its close links with the Scottish Executive and its agencies SURF acts as a constructive channel for information, consultation and policy proposals based on the knowledge and experience of its membership and the wider networks it connects with.

SURF website: www.scotregen.co.uk

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)

Highlands and Islands Enterprise is the Scottish Executive's development agency for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

HIE's activities include: provision of business support services, delivery of training and learning programmes, assistance for community and cultural projects and measures for environmental renewal.

One of HIE's priorities for action is working with agencies, such as local authorities and Communities Scotland, together with the voluntary and private sectors, to bring more integrated and innovative approaches to community regeneration and asset management, including housing and other infrastructure.

HIE website: www.hie.co.uk

One NorthEast (ONE)

One NorthEast is the Regional Development Agency (RDA) covering the North East region of England, comprising Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, County Durham and Tees Valley.

The Regeneration Team of One NorthEast is responsible for ensuring that the Agency is able to deliver its physical regeneration and development policies and strategies throughout the region. The Agency works closely with the four Sub Regional Partnerships to deliver a broad range of physical regeneration projects. These projects are aimed at improving the physical environment, transport and communication links and at increasing the availability of high quality business premises and development sites throughout the region.

ONE website: www.onenortheast.co.uk

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is one of the largest social policy research and development charities in the UK, spending about £7 million a year on a research and development programme that seeks to better understand the causes of social difficulties and explore ways of overcoming them.

JRF website: www.jrf.org.uk

The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland (BLF)

The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland has substantial assets to invest in Community Asset Building. In doing so, it aims to support regeneration that the community is leading. It hopes to help communities acquire and develop local assets through which they can provide quality services and amenities that are sustainable in the long-term – both financially and environmentally.

BLF website: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/scotland

SURF appreciates the support of its eleven sponsoring members:

