Background to Client Project

Nicole Coffey Kellett
Professor of Anthropology, University of Maine at Farmington
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The Center for Entrepreneurial Studies (CES) is a nonprofit organization in Farmington, Maine. The organization began by a group of high school students securing grant funding to develop entrepreneurial projects and has since expanded to a youth-led gift shop with a well-resourced makerspace in the center of Farmington's historic downtown. CES has acquired land to expand its operations to incorporate projects centered on affordable housing, gardening, construction, culinary arts, and other areas. While not all CES participants are limited financially, many contend with insecure housing, food, and overall support making it difficult to remain in school. With upcoming changes in the organization, the director, Bonita Tompkins, wanted to know more about the experiences of youth in the program. Specifically, she was interested in the extent to which CES provided a sense of community as well as adequate training and experience in various soft and hard skills. She also wanted to learn more about what students desired for CES' future directions.

Students in my Social Science Research Methods class were divided into three groups to tackle these questions from various vantage points. One group conducted interviews, another group used photovoice methodologies, and the third group did a survey. While our overall participation numbers were low due to challenges with recruitment, we were able to discern some key findings regarding participants' conceptions of success and sense of community along with strategic marketing ideas.

We presented our results to ACRN and Bonita who will be sharing the results with CES Board Members and others active with the organization. We are hopeful that connections made through the process of completing this project will prove fruitful for CES so it can continue to have a positive impact on the lives of youth in this small town in the corner of Maine.