Seeding Change in Rural and Reservation Communities

The story of Horizons

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Seeding Change in Rural and Reservation Communities

The story of Horizons

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Contents

Seeding change in rural and reservation
communities: The story of Horizons
           Wilder Research, October 2013

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Foreword

My favorite memory of Horizons is a 2010 visit I made with the Northwest Area Foundation Board of Directors to Fort Yates, North Dakota, on the Standing Rock Reservation. We talked with a woman who had been active in the town's Horizons poverty reduction project. Specifically, she was instrumental in creating a food shelf for residents in need.

I worked in grassroots hunger relief in the 1990s, so food security is something I'm passionate about – but it wasn't the specifics of that project that grabbed me. It was what the woman we were visiting said about herself, her family, and her community.

She told us that working on that Horizons project was the first time she really felt she could roll up her sleeves and make Fort Yates a better place to live. She said the project gave her a chance to say to her young daughter, *"You can make change. You can make our town and our nation better. You can contribute."* The number of dollars that came to Fort Yates through Horizons was relatively small, less than $20,000, but something priceless was sparked: a new sense of possibility.

Is there still poverty in that community? Yes, there is. Did Horizons solve the challenges that the Lakota people of Standing Rock, the relatives of Sitting Bull, have faced ever since the reservation system was imposed upon them? Of course not. But Horizons did awaken something precious in the woman who shared her story with us: a belief in her own power to shape her community's future.

That renewal of hope and engagement in civic life is something we saw again and again in Horizons communities. It is a remarkable legacy of the initiative. Nonetheless, after three funding cycles that touched 283 communities and engaged more than 100,000 participants, the Northwest Area Foundation exited the program in 2010.

One of our reasons for doing so was the high cost of the model. We invested nearly $34 million in Horizons, but did not succeed in attracting large-scale funding partners to the program. We concluded we could not continue under those circumstances. Just as importantly, however, we observed that Horizons was more effective in fostering civic engagement and igniting a community's hope for the future than in making clear measurable progress on poverty. For these two related reasons – cost and strategy – we made the difficult decision to redirect our limited resources to other poverty reduction approaches.

Thank you for your interest in Horizons. I believe you will find this report from Wilder Research to be a helpful overview, but I encourage you to follow the links that will take you deeper. Ultimately, I hope you can find something here – in the theory of change, or the program structure, or progress on the ground in Horizons communities, or the Northwest Area Foundation's lessons learned – that will spark your imagination, as the imaginations of so many Horizons participants were sparked.

The need to strengthen rural communities' capacity and blaze new pathways from poverty to prosperity is as acute as ever. Think of the Horizons experiment as a sign post on that journey.

Kevin F. Walker
President and Chief Executive Officer
Northwest Area Foundation

Introduction

> I learned a lot from Horizons…There was a craft to this work and it was a very bold and creative strategy that thought about a lot of different angles… It was very well thought through. The part that wasn't thought through as well was the end game, which is the hardest part to think about when you are doing anything. — NWAF staff

The Northwest Area Foundation (NWAF) serves a broad geographic region with diverse communities. Capacity and leadership within these communities play a key role in the Foundation's ability to pursue its work and advance its mission of helping low-income populations build their assets and wealth. This may be especially true in the case of small, rural and reservation communities, which have been hit hard by the economic recession and face the added challenges of geographic isolation and dwindling populations. Given these factors, how can a foundation working to raise prosperity region-wide best use its limited resources to seed change in rural areas?

This is the story of Horizons, a major rural community leadership program undertaken by NWAF to address poverty in rural areas. The goal of the program was to identify, prepare, and equip new leaders and help them take community action on poverty (Morehouse, 2010). In large part, Horizons succeeded. Many communities formed plans and common definitions of poverty, and new leaders helped expand communities' existing capacity to pursue change. But did this capacity translate into measurable poverty reduction, and what are the implications for a foundation working to build capacity toward specific mission-driven goals? These are more complicated questions to answer.

In order to fully understand and learn from the Horizons experience, NWAF contracted with Wilder Research to write a final "lessons learned" report. Wilder reviewed evaluation findings from Diane Morehouse, president of QED, a research and evaluation consulting practice. Then Wilder facilitated discussion groups with NWAF staff (July 2012) and Horizons delivery organizations (January 2011), which were the grantees, to gather their thoughts on the Horizons experience. The following sections detail what happened during the Horizons program, what was learned from the experience, and how these lessons can inform the Foundation's future work, as well as the broader field of philanthropy.

The Northwest Area Foundation

The Northwest Area Foundation (NWAF) supports efforts to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable prosperity in the eight-state region encompassing Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, and Washington, and 75 tribal nations that share the same geography. The Foundation focuses on the work of proven or promising organizations that have demonstrated success or are positioned to undertake innovative work in poverty reduction. For additional information on the Northwest Area Foundation, visit www.nwaf.org.

Community context

When NWAF launched Horizons in 2003, rural and reservation communities across its eight-state region faced endemic poverty issues (Morehouse, 2010). Human capital and jobs left these communities as economic prosperity from natural resources diminished. At the same time, demographic shifts diversified local populations, bringing in immigrants and minorities who may not be represented in a town's traditional leadership base. Native communities in the region faced even higher rates of poverty.

HORIZONS COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

	Horizons I (pilot)	Horizons II	Horizons III
Total number of communities involved	44	163 (140 completed, 85% completion rate)	103 (99 completed, 96% completion rate)
Number of reservation communities involved (included in number above)	9	26	5
Community size	100-4800 people	100-4988 people	202-4111 people
Total participants involved	15,572 people	55,144 people	30,318 people
Community poverty	10%-95%	10%-78%	7%-57%

Morehouse 2010

NWAF realized that to advance its mission of reducing poverty and building sustainable prosperity across its region, it would need to build the capacity of rural and reservation communities to support change. The idea was to empower these small towns to address problems in the context of their own community needs and capacity. (A full list of the communities that participated in Horizons can be found in the appendix. It should be noted that this list includes all of the communities that began Horizons; however, not all communities completed the program).

Horizons model

From 2003-10, NWAF supported grantees working in 283 high-poverty communities with populations of 5,000 or less. The program spanned seven of the eight NWAF states. Oregon participated in the pilot phase of the program (Phase I), but (in agreement with NWAF) decided not to move forward with Horizons II and, instead, worked with the Ford Family Foundation to continue its leadership work.

The notion of Horizons took shape over several months of meetings with experts knowledgeable about and deeply rooted within rural communities. The design group included representatives from university Extension Services and tribal colleges within the Foundation's eight-state region. Some of these institutions would eventually become grantees delivering the Horizon program within their states.

> **Theory of Change: Horizons**
>
> **Horizons I:** If we improve leadership systems within small, rural communities, the communities will be able to take action on poverty reduction.
>
> **Horizons II and III:** Focusing small rural communities on poverty reduction **and** enhancing their leadership systems will result in community action on poverty.

Awards were given to delivery organizations in three 18-month stages and ranged from around $337,000 in the pilot phase to $1,147,000 in the Horizons III phase. An external evaluator monitored the program and recommended refinements along the way. NWAF invested a total of nearly $34 million in the Horizons program, from the planning stages to post-Horizons III. Horizons included a leadership development program using the LeadershipPLENTY® curriculum, which "consists of nine modules that address primary civic skills that enable graduates to confidently identify problems in their communities and implement a plan of action to combat those problems."[1]

> Horizons was predicated on the theory that communities already possess many of the assets and skills to arrest social and economic decline, and can, with leadership training, resources and support, craft and implement a shared community vision to address poverty in meaningful ways.
> — Morehouse, 2010

One of the key lessons learned from the pilot was that the original program theory was not completely accurate. As Morehouse writes, "…leadership alone was not sufficient to move communities to action on poverty." Communities also had to better *understand* poverty and focus on poverty reduction; therefore, the theory of change was altered (see sidebar). To help initiate and guide conversations, the program implemented structured community discussions, called Study Circles. Study Circles, designed by Everyday Democracy, are facilitated discussion groups where community members can express their opinions about a topic in a safe, non-judgmental environment. See appendix for a description of Horizons.

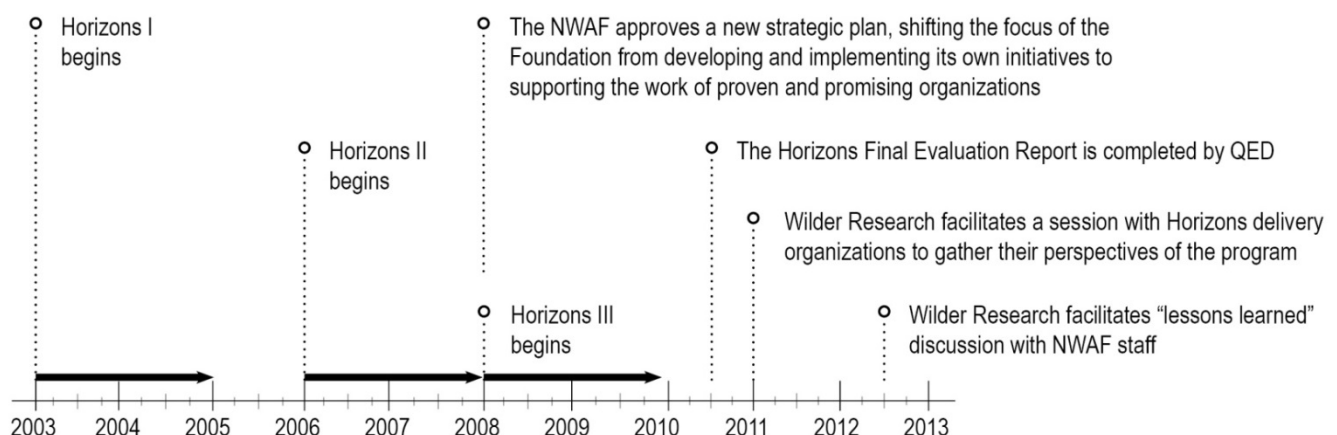[1] http://www.pew-partnership.org/lpinstitute.html

Horizons partners

NWAF knew that it would need partners in Horizons – organizations that could serve as intermediaries between the St. Paul-based Foundation and its most remote communities. Therefore, the latter were partnered with delivery organizations which were responsible for implementing the program long-term and for serving as an intermediary between the Foundation and communities. These delivery organizations were the grant recipients and fiscal agents for the dollars, and were typically university Extension Services and tribal colleges. (Extension programs engage with people and communities to advance their economic well-being and quality of life through the application of university resources.) Delivery organizations provided coaching, training, and resources to develop and advance community action plans; helped communities develop local and regional partnerships; guided conversation and education on rural poverty; and supported and held communities accountable to required performance expectations. Over time, Horizons proved to be a transformative experience not only for small towns, but also for the delivery organizations themselves (this is described more fully in the Accomplishments section of the report).

Program components

- 283 high-poverty rural and reservation communities
- Community populations of ≤ 5,000
- States: ID, IA, MN, MT, ND, SD, WA, and OR (pilot only)
- 3 phases of implementation:

  Horizons I (2003-2005)

  Horizons II (2006-2008)

  Horizons III (2008-2010)
- Delivery organizations as intermediaries
- Awards between $337,000 and $1,147,000 to delivery organizations (depending on the number of communities participating)
- Study Circles
- LeadershipPLENTY® curriculum

HORIZONS TIMELINE

Horizons I begins

The NWAF approves a new strategic plan, shifting the focus of the Foundation from developing and implementing its own initiatives to supporting the work of proven and promising organizations

Horizons II begins

The Horizons Final Evaluation Report is completed by QED

Wilder Research facilitates a session with Horizons delivery organizations to gather their perspectives of the program

Horizons III begins

Wilder Research facilitates "lessons learned" discussion with NWAF staff

2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013

Phases of implementation

Horizons was divided into three phases, called Horizons I (the pilot phase), II, and III, each of which are outlined below.

Horizons I (Pilot)

Horizons began as a pilot program model in 2003 and involved 44 rural and reservation communities. Communities worked in clusters of three to complete an 18-month leadership training and action planning sequence. Eleven delivery organizations with deep ties in local communities implemented the program. These included state university Extension Services in Iowa, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Washington, Rural Development Initiatives, Inc. in Oregon, and two tribal colleges (Sitting Bull College and Salish Kootenai College). As stated earlier, leadership development was supported using the Pew Partnership for Civic Change's LeadershipPLENTY® curriculum.

Overall, the pilot program was viewed as a success. Communities reported enhanced leadership capacity, and leadership itself was viewed more as a collective rather than individual endeavor. There were, however, early challenges and lessons to be learned from the Horizons I experience. Attracting low-income individuals to leadership opportunities proved more difficult than originally thought due to barriers such as having multiple jobs and lack of childcare. Communities also struggled to focus their leadership efforts on poverty, specifically in the absence of shared understanding and definitions. Lessons from Horizons I were used to refine and expand the model in its second iteration. As mentioned above, the theory of change was amended to reflect the importance of a deeper understanding of poverty and poverty reduction.

Horizons II

In 2006, NWAF substantially expanded its Horizons model to involve 163 communities, including 26 reservation communities. This time, the program incorporated a Study Circles model from Everyday Democracy, in addition to the LeadershipPLENTY® curriculum. Study Circles added to the Horizons program by helping communities better understand poverty and how to have a conversation about it. Delivery organizations continued to implement the program and play a central intermediary role between the Foundation and Horizons communities. In Horizons II, they had the additional role of helping communities meet required performance thresholds. The pilot phase illustrated that, in order to move program participants to action more quickly, activities needed to be more clearly focused and outlined; therefore the Horizons II curriculum was "redesigned as a sequenced set of activities with clear expectations for participation and accomplishment," also known as performance thresholds (Morehouse, 2010).

The program was again viewed largely as a success. Most communities (86%) completed the program, successfully meeting its accountability expectations. As in the pilot phase, Horizons II succeeded in identifying, empowering, and building the capacity of new community leaders, as well as enhancing civic

engagement, such as increased attendance at local government meetings. Through the evaluation, communities reported changes in the way local decisions were made, especially that more voices were included in the decision-making process.

In perhaps one of the program's greatest legacies, communities also succeeded in developing structures for sustaining program activities and continuing to seek grant funds. Delivery organizations worked with communities to either identify existing nonprofits or create a new nonprofit or community foundation to receive and house funds. At the time of the 2010 Morehouse evaluation, $21.6 million had been raised by communities.

> This was a deliberate focus of the program and an expectation for delivery organizations; creating structures that would sustain the new leaders and provide sources of support for community enhancement and poverty-reduction activities. — Morehouse, 2010

Evaluation findings also suggested that the Study Circles process was a meaningful experience for communities. The guided community dialogues helped build awareness of poverty and the potential solutions for poverty reduction. That being said, however, the plans that communities developed often did not address poverty reduction specifically. Morehouse and her team estimated that even with an expansive definition of poverty, only 59 percent of the community visioning plans had a deliberate focus specifically on economic poverty reduction. Other areas addressed in plans included community improvement efforts such as celebrations and gatherings, volunteerism, recreational opportunities, and civic beautification. While good for the community, these efforts are not considered long term solutions to poverty. The differences in focus among communities stemmed partly from a lack of clear understanding about expectations for activities, as well as a lack of clear definition of poverty or understanding of strategies to reduce poverty.

Perhaps most striking were the lessons learned by the program's experience in Native communities. These communities faced significant challenges associated with extremely high levels of poverty and limited infrastructure – even in comparison to the high-poverty, non-reservation, rural communities targeted by Horizons.

> Nearly all of [the] reservation communities were at pains to remind us that extreme generational poverty [and] lack of infrastructure and connection to resources provided the Horizons program with special challenges, not easily met. — Morehouse & Kroll, 2008

In addition, program concepts around poverty and leadership did not fit well with the customs and values in Native communities. For example, although the majority of those living on reservations are in financial poverty, according to Morehouse, most did not define themselves as poor, emphasizing instead the strength of family and culture in their communities. The Horizons program and Native communities also had different understandings of leadership; while the latter embraced collective leadership, the idea of "individual initiative" was outside of the cultural norm (Morehouse & Kroll, 2008).

Horizons III

A total of 99 communities completed the final phase of the Horizons program, including five reservation communities; this was a significant drop from the 26 reservation communities that participated in Horizons II. The drop was due partly to the fact that Sitting Bull College did not continue as a delivery organization into Horizons III. A larger percentage of Horizons II communities (29%) had poverty rates over 20 percent, compared to communities in the final phase of the initiative (Horizons III: 18%). As Morehouse states, the higher rate in Horizons II was largely because of the participation of extremely high-poverty reservation communities. These numbers highlight the disparate level of wealth that Native communities face, even among other low-income populations, and the importance of providing assistance to these communities.

Findings from the final phase of Horizons are similar to those from phases I and II. Communities continued to identify and energize new leaders, garner high levels of engagement among community members, and increase awareness of poverty.

One change that was made to the Horizons III program was an increased emphasis on poverty, management, and coaching to clearly link discussion and learning from the Study Circles to more concrete actions to address poverty. Morehouse states "a significantly higher percentage of Study Circles participants reported that they had taken some kind of action to address poverty before the Study Circles process concluded." Horizons III communities were also found to have greater consistency between the action ideas generated in the Study Circles and their actual plans to reduce poverty, which were developed based on a community's experiences in Horizons. Because communities were not always clear on their strategies around poverty reduction, much of their work reflected programming examples given in Study Circles curriculum.

Horizons III continued to struggle with maintaining a clear, consistent focus on poverty, specifically economic poverty. While many of the communities focused on broader definitions, such as the emotional needs of residents, financial needs were less clearly addressed, and some of the communities expressed concern that NWAF and delivery organizations changed their focus to economic poverty after communities had begun their programs. However, it should be noted that many delivery organizations were encouraged to use many definitions of poverty while working with communities.

Horizons accomplishments

After completion of the final phase, QED wrote a report synthesizing findings from its ongoing evaluation of the Horizons program. The accomplishments and challenges outlined below are based on the findings from QED president, Diane Morehouse. The Horizons program saw a number of successes over the course of eight years, including:

- **Community mobilization**: A total of 101,034 people participated in the Horizons process, which was 30 percent of the entire population of the participating communities. Not only did communities become involved with the Horizons program in large numbers, but a majority (91%) also saw the process through to the end. This is a significant achievement considering that NWAF staff originally estimated that 50 percent would complete the program.

> **Accomplishments of Horizons**
>
> - High participation and completion rates
> - Hope sparked in struggling towns
> - New and empowered leaders
> - Increased civic engagement
> - Structures developed for sustaining program efforts
> - Delivery organizations more connected to the community
> - Increased understanding of and emphasis on poverty

- **Hope sparked in struggling towns**: One of the big successes to come out of Horizons is the sense of hope the program created for communities, and the knowledge that steps can be taken to tackle the daunting task of poverty reduction. This is especially important considering the serious challenges that these rural and reservation communities faced, such as decreasing populations and resources. Horizons helped communities realize that they have the power and tools for self-improvement even in difficult economic times.

- **New and empowered leaders:** Throughout the entire Horizons program, communities were able to identify and engage new leaders. These leaders reported that they had gained new knowledge and skills, such as working on community development issues, working with groups and group process, and implementing community change and action efforts. Self-reported gains in leadership skills were especially prevalent in Horizons III. In addition, communities were able to sustain these positive leadership outcomes (more new and knowledgeable leaders) over time.

- **Increased civic engagement:** Another outcome reported throughout the Horizons process was enhanced civic engagement in communities. There was greater attendance in city council and school board meetings, more participation on local boards and civic organizations, more volunteerism, a high level of electoral participation, and more community members running for public office. Communities implemented an array of community enhancement activities, including economic and

job development, community cleanup programs, adult and community education, and youth programs. Just as with the leadership outcomes, this increased civic engagement was sustained over time.

- **Structures developed for sustaining program efforts and seeking grant funds:** All communities also made progress in building community structures and forging ongoing partnerships with non-profits, state and federal agencies, and delivery organizations. As of 2010 (when the QED evaluation was completed), Horizons communities had raised $21,613,409 million in grant funds or through local fundraising, and nearly half (47%) of Horizons alumni communities had developed new partnerships with state or regional nonprofit groups to help implement or support the community poverty-reduction plan (Morehouse, 2010). To this day, several communities are continuing the work they started under Horizons.

- **Positive changes to delivery organizations:** The work done in Horizons had a positive impact on the delivery organizations, as well as on the communities themselves. For university Extension programs, these changes included learning how to work in partnership with the entire community, placing greater emphasis on poverty (and in turn having the community perceive Extension programs as a possible source of poverty-reduction work), and rethinking community outreach. Just as with the communities, some delivery organizations are continuing the work that they started through Horizons.

- **Increased understanding of and emphasis on poverty:** Horizons' impact on addressing poverty was less clear than other outcomes, and the challenges the program faced are outlined below. On the positive side, discussions through the Study Circles process appeared to change participants' attitudes and provide them with a new knowledge and understanding of poverty; although it is important to note that this increase in knowledge is self-reported. As time went on, Horizons communities also increased the number of activities that linked directly to poverty, particularly economic poverty. At the time of her report, Morehouse found that a majority (77%) of Horizons III communities were working on one or more of NWAF's new strategic goals for poverty reduction; these included: jobs and economic development, adult and community education, entrepreneurship and/or microenterprise development, housing, transportation, or other ways to create assets and build family wealth.

Horizons challenges

While these accomplishments are an important aspect of the legacy of Horizons, there were several challenges that the communities and delivery organizations faced. These include:

- **A lack of clear focus on economic poverty:** As Morehouse writes in her evaluation report, poverty was defined very broadly, especially in the pilot phase, and there was not a clear framework for addressing it. In part, this was because communities were unfamiliar with asset and wealth development tools that could help move families out of poverty, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit. Horizons II worked to correct this problem by implementing Study Circles to guide community conversations on

> **Challenges of Horizons**
>
> - A lack of clear focus on economic poverty
> - Fitting the Horizons program with the needs and values of Native communities
> - Involving low-income individuals in leadership roles

  poverty. Even with those discussions, however, communities did not necessarily take actions towards improving the financial well-being of families. Many, instead, chose to work on amelioration projects, such as increasing volunteerism, planning community gatherings, and the beautification of public spaces. (These were all projects suggested in the Study Circles curriculum.) While these are meaningful ways to improve a community, they do not address the deeper-rooted, ongoing problem of economic poverty. Many communities attributed their focus on non-economic facets of poverty to unclear expectations from the Foundation. An added complication was that the delivery organizations did not have experience working in poverty reduction either; they were learning along with the communities.

- **Fitting the Horizons program with the needs and values of Native communities:** As mentioned previously, Native communities face extremely high rates of poverty and struggle with challenges that non-Native communities do not. These communities, therefore, may have needed more local support than was provided. The Horizons program model was not always a good fit for Native communities, as the program's definitions of poverty and leadership did not embrace Native values. For example, although the majority of those living on reservations are in financial poverty, according to Morehouse, most did not define themselves as poor, emphasizing instead the strength of family and culture in their communities. Similarly, Native communities had differing views of leadership from the Horizons program; blending new leaders with established and elected leaders was a challenge, as was emphasizing the notion of "individual initiative."

- **Difficulty involving low-income individuals in leadership roles:** Horizons also had difficulty recruiting and retaining low-income individuals in leadership roles. Low-income individuals face a variety of barriers that can restrict their ability to participate in leadership opportunities, such as scheduling conflicts and no or limited access to childcare and transportation.

Lessons learned and implications for future work

The Northwest Area Foundation has reflected extensively on its experience with the Horizons initiative, and identified a number of lessons which may be instructive to the broader philanthropic community. These lessons are outlined below.

Lessons for grantmaking

Consider exit strategies up front

One very positive aspect of the Horizons initiative was that long-term relationships were developed between those involved; NWAF cultivated long-term relationships with the delivery organizations, and the delivery organizations built long-term relationships with the communities. Horizons communities received support from delivery organizations for the duration of the program, even beyond their own 18-month grant period, and the delivery organizations themselves were shaped by the experience; they were able to add considerable resources that impacted staffing and the organizations' ability to focus on poverty specifically.

A challenge that emerged was that, while grant periods occurred in distinct 18-month phases, the long-term nature of the program and the relationships that formed between the communities, delivery organizations, and Foundation may have cultivated an expectation that Horizons would continue for a longer period of time. However, in 2008, NWAF developed a new strategic direction, shifting the Foundation's emphasis from managing and operating its own programs to supporting the established and innovative efforts of nonprofit organizations. The plan also focused the Foundation's work on three outcome areas – increased assets and wealth among people with low incomes, increased capacity and leadership to reduce poverty, and improved public policy solutions to reduce poverty. In light of this change in direction, NWAF convened delivery organizations to prepare them for the termination of the Horizons program and facilitate discussions to

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Key lessons learned from the Horizons experience

Grantmaking

- Consider exit strategies up front
- Know whether you are funding a project or funding change
- Be clear about your funding strategy and expectations in general
- Seek funding partners early

Working with rural and reservation communities

- Think locally *and* regionally
- Engage Native communities in program design, and tailor strategies to the needs and culture of residents

Capacity building

- Know whether your goal is capacity building in itself or for a specific end
- Meet communities where they are

Poverty reduction

- Focus on long-term, systemic strategies
- Clarify your definition of poverty

help them consider sustainability plans. Nevertheless, some delivery organizations struggled to sustain the work of communities and felt frustrated by the strategic shift.

In speaking with NWAF staff, a key lesson learned from the Horizons experience is being able to clearly identify and articulate an exit strategy to grantees and Foundation staff at the front end of a grant. While Horizons occurred in distinct 18-month phases, the close relationships that formed between Foundation staff and delivery organizations, and expectations from the delivery organizations that the program might continue past the final date, made ending the program more difficult.

> The question of sustainability of the model was always a question that I had. — NWAF staff

> The fact of the matter is that the Foundation, at that time, had developed long term relationships between the delivery organizations and Foundation staff, which made it difficult to disentangle. — NWAF staff

Know whether you are funding a project or funding change

According to NWAF President Kevin Walker, considering an exit strategy also begs a larger question with important implications for grantmaking: "How does a foundation foster change in communities as opposed to engineering a project in a community?" If a project's conclusion leaves grantees or communities wondering what happens next, that may signal that greater attention should have been paid to the overall goal – Was the aim to fund a defined project or instigate long-term change? And what are the potential implications? NWAF takes a different funding approach now: instead of managing and operating its own programs, it supports nonprofits and other entities that run programs, initiatives, and collaborations that help people get out and stay out of poverty. This is seen as a more sustainable way of advancing change.

> The thinking underneath [our current grantmaking] has been formed by that Horizons experience, and what we're trying to do in supporting existing organizations to advance their missions is to foster change that might last beyond our grant period. — NWAF staff

Be clear about your funding strategy and expectations in general

In addition to the distinction between funding a project versus funding change, NWAF staff mentioned the importance of focusing the Foundation's work in general. NWAF is more clearly focused on specific funding areas, particularly increasing assets and wealth among low-income populations. An important lesson from the Horizons experience is that, while it was good work to be doing, it was not completely aligned with the Foundation's refined focus.

> A constant struggle I think we have is that there's no lack of good work to fund versus work that fits within our focus area. I think there's something here to help inform us and help with that process too. — NWAF staff

Seek funding partners early

NWAF worked to attract other funding support for Horizons, but found it difficult to engage partners with a program that was already developed and so strongly associated with NWAF. Reflecting back on their efforts to bring other funders on board, staff felt that Horizons was perceived as a very specific program designed with precise expectations and parameters. This, combined with the program's high cost, made it a difficult sell to other funders.

> That basic lesson has definitely helped shape how we do things today. We seek partners from the get-go as opposed to building something and hoping it will be so good that others will adopt it. — NWAF staff

> I think it was a brand issue. We had branded something that was our brand and nobody else was able to pick up on because it was their brand. — NWAF staff

Lessons for working with rural and reservation communities

Think locally *and* regionally

A strength of Horizons was that, by empowering communities to cultivate their own leadership and poverty-reduction plans, the program was rooted in the local context of individual communities. Underlying Horizons was an assumption that, with the support of delivery organizations, small towns could reduce poverty in a meaningful way themselves. To realistically help rural and reservation communities reduce poverty, however, Foundation staff members now feel that funders need to find ways to connect towns to additional resources and foster regional connections. Adding to the importance of this is the Foundation's own limited resources. Over the course of Horizons, Foundation staff learned the importance of helping communities develop regional partnerships.

> With our limited resources we have to be looking for angles that have some kind of broader reach than just investing in a particular town's very specific plan. — NWAF staff

Engage Native communities in program design, and tailor strategies to the needs and culture of residents

Horizons was designed to build capacity in small, low-income communities and Native communities; partnering with the two tribal college delivery organizations fit that general definition. However, the Foundation learned early on that understandings of poverty and leadership often differed significantly

in these communities when compared to the other rural towns served, and the level of poverty on the reservations was such that effectively supporting the program there would require a larger investment. Collaborating with Native partners at the front end of a project could help everyone involved learn and understand all of the necessary perspectives (such as definitions of poverty and leadership) and ultimately make the program run more smoothly.

> I think we're still informed by the sense of misfit in Native communities we experienced through Horizons. That was, to shorthand it, an example of thinking you could apply a strategy in Indian country and it would operate the same way that it was working out of these non-Native Extension service relationships. I think we learned from that. Our thinking today about how we work in Indian country is informed by that part of the experience. — NWAF staff

Lessons for working on capacity building

Know whether your goal is capacity building in itself or capacity building to a specific end

In a paper prepared for the Intermountain West Funder Network and Philanthropy Northwest, Daniel Kemmis and Sindhu Knotz presented a continuum for capacity – on the left is community capacity building as a means to a different end, and on the right is community capacity building as an end in itself. The continuum recognizes the inherent tension in empowering communities to create their own solutions and at the same time wanting progress on a foundation's specific mission-driven goals. According to Kemmis and Knotz, there are different approaches to building community capacity, but it is important to know where on the continuum you fall.

In the case of Horizons, some communities wanted to pursue projects such as community beautification efforts that, although a vehicle for cultivating community relationships and capacity to advance change, were not directly tied to poverty reduction. Horizons empowered communities to develop their own solutions, but at the same time NWAF had a specific poverty-reduction mission that the program was intended to address.

> We thought we could engineer this so that we build their leadership capacity and they would reduce poverty; and in aggregate what we got more often was, "We built some leadership capacity. We fostered some civic engagement. We started a sense of hope in communities." It turned out to be harder than we thought to get them to take that leap from beautification or other low hanging fruit that made sense to them to something that would quantifiably reduce poverty. — NWAF staff

Meet communities where they are

As might be expected, impact was uneven across Horizons communities, since each community had a different set of needs and strengths going into the program. The implication for community capacity building efforts is that it is important to know the existing capacity of the communities to be served and the degree of change that is expected to take place.

Lessons for working on poverty reduction

Focus on long-term, systemic strategies

An overarching lesson learned from the Horizons evaluation is the need to focus poverty-reduction efforts on long-term, systemic strategies such as job skills training and public policy changes. It can be argued that a broad array of civic enhancement efforts ultimately contribute to poverty reduction, and in some cases Horizons participants felt that efforts such as community beautification initiatives laid the groundwork for having more difficult conversations around poverty. However, Morehouse in her evaluation suggests that to truly impact assets and wealth, efforts require a focus on strategies to reduce economic poverty specifically (Mohr and Owen, 2012, p. 36).

> I think part of the flaw of this…is we had something that was very ill defined and we were coming to communities and saying now solve this. — NWAF staff

Clarify your definition of poverty

There are many different definitions of poverty and, as described throughout this report, Horizons communities took a broad view of the issue, rather than focusing in on economic poverty. Definitions can also vary across cultures; therefore, taking the time to clearly narrow and define the issue of poverty is critical in working towards poverty reduction.

> You get into this amorphous space when you go to a community and say, "We want you to solve poverty," because it means so many different things to different people. And different people have different perspectives on both the collective and individual aspects of what that means to resolve poverty. — NWAF staff

The Foundation can use each of these lessons as it moves forward and continues to refine its strategy. Although grantmaking has shifted away from leadership and capacity building, the experiences of Horizons are valuable for NWAF and other foundations, particularly in working with rural and reservation communities and grantmaking more broadly.

Appendices

Sources consulted

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Morehouse, D. (2010). Northwest Area Foundation Horizons program final evaluation report. Menomonie, WI: QED.

Morehouse, D. & Kroll, B. (2008). The Horizons experience in Native American communities: Two views (internal report). QED and CLEAR, Inc.

Pew Partnership for Civic Change website: http://www.pew-partnership.org/lpinstitute.html

List of Horizons communities

HORIZONS PROGRAM COMMUNITIES 2003-2005

MINNESOTA
1. Bagley
2. Red Lake Falls
3. Aitkin
4. Frazee
5. *Jackson
Grantee: University of Minnesota Extension
* Grantee: Iowa State University Extension

IOWA
1. Hartley
2. Emmetsburg
Grantee: Iowa State University Extension

NORTH DAKOTA
1. Beach
2. Regent
3. Mott
4. *Grafton
5. Ashley
6. Ellendale
7. Cavalier
8. Watford City
Grantee: North Dakota State University Extension
*Grantee: University of Minnesota Extension

SOUTH DAKOTA
1. Kenel
2. Little Eagle
3. Bear Soldier/McLaughlin
4. *Eureka
Grantee: Sitting Bull College
* Grantee: North Dakota State University Extension

5. Dupree
6. Isabel
7. Timber Lake
Grantee: South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension

MONTANA
1. Elmo
2. Hot Springs
3. Arlee
Grantee: Salish Kootenai College

4. Circle
5. Glendive
6. Sidney
7. Wolf Point
Grantee: Montana State University Extension

WASHINGTON
1. Tonasket
2. Omak
3. Bridgeport
4. Chewelah
Grantee: Washington State University Extension Service

IDAHO
1. Elk River
2. Orofino
3. Kamiah
4. Pierce/Weippe
Grantee: University of Idaho Extension

OREGON
1. Elgin
2. Union
3. Prairie City
4. Maupin
Grantee: Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) Inc.

TRIBES
1. Hoh River Tribe
2. Quileute Tribe
3. Elwha Klallam Tribe
Grantee: Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI – EDC)

HORIZONS PROGRAM COMMUNITIES 2006-2008

MINNESOTA
1. *Callaway
2. *Cass Lake
3. Chisholm
4. Ellendale
5. Elmore
6. Eveleth
7. Fertile
8. Floodwood
9. Hokah
10. *Little Rock
11. Mountain Lake
12. *Naytahwaush
13. New York Mills
14. Olivia
15. *Onigum
16. *Ponemah
17. *Red Lake
18. *Redby
19. St. James
20. Wabasha
Grantee: UMN Extension
*Grantee: Sitting Bull College

IOWA
1. Allerton
2. Alta
3. Bedford
4. Chariton
5. Corydon
6. Ellsworth
7. Elma
8. Grand Junction
9. Greenfield
10. Humeston
11. Keosauqua
12. Lake City
13. Morning Sun
14. Olin
15. Oxford Junction
16. Rockford
17. Sac City
18. Scranton
19. Seymour
20. Wapello
21. Waukon
22. Woodbine
23. Wyoming
Grantee: ISU Extension

NORTH DAKOTA
1. Anamoose
2. Bowdon
3. Cando
4. Cooperstown
5. Dodge
6. *Fort Totten
7. Gackle
8. Grant County
9. Harvey
10. Hazelton
11. Lidgerwood
12. Linton
13. Maddock
14. *Mandaree
15. McKenzie County
16. Mohall
17. New Town
18. *Parshall
19. Rocklake
20. Rolette
21. Rugby/Towner
22. Rutland
23. Sheyenne
24. Stanley
25. Steele
26. *Trenton
27. Walhalla
Grantee: NDSU Extension,
* Grantee: Sitting Bull College

IDAHO
1. Bonner's Ferry
2. Bovill
3. Cascade
4. Coeur d'Alene Reservation
5. Cottonwood
6. Grangeville
7. Kendrick/Juliaetta
8. Kooskia
9. Riggins
10. Silver Valley
11. St. Maries
12. Stites
13. Troy
14. Up River
Grantee: University of Idaho Extension

MONTANA

1. Anaconda
2. Baker
3. Big Timber
4. Boulder
5. Brockway
6. Columbus
7. Crow Agency
8. Culbertson
9. Ekalaka
10. Forsyth
11. Glasgow
12. Hardin
13. Harlowton
14. Melstone/Musselshell
15. Poplar
16. Roundup
17. Scobey
18. Terry
19. Townsend
20. White Sulphur Springs
21. Whitehall
22. Wibaux
23. Wolf Point
Grantee: MSU Extension

WASHINGTON

1. Castle Rock
2. Cathlamet
3. Chewelah
4. Columbia School District
5. Colville
6. Glenwood
7. Goldendale
8. Kettle Falls/Marcus
9. Klickitat
10. Mattawa
11. Mossy Rock
12. N. Moses Lake
13. Northport
14. Pe Ell
15. Republic
16. Ritzville
17. Royal City
18. Sprague
19. Springdale
20. Stevenson
21. Trout Lake
22. Warden
23. White Salmon/Bingen
Grantee: WSU

SOUTH DAKOTA

1. Armour
2. Bison
3. Buffalo Gap
4. Conde
5. Lead/Deadwood
6. Estelline
7. Faith
8. Frederick
9. *Greenwood
10. Hot Springs
11. Iroquois
12. Martin
13. *Marty
14. *Pejuta Haka (Kyle)
15. *Mission
16. Montrose
17. Murdo
18. Newell
19. Oldham
20. *Parmelee
21. Philip
22. *Porcupine
23. Presho
24. Sanborn Central
25. Scotland
26. Sisseton
27. Tripp
28. Tyndall
29. Wagner
30. Whitewood
31. *White River
32. *White Swan
Grantee: SDSU Cooperative Extension
*Grantee: Sitting Bull College

HORIZONS PROGRAM COMMUNITIES 2008-2010

MINNESOTA
1. Akeley
2. Appleton
3. Braham
4. Elysian
5. Evansville
6. Gaylord
7. Hoffman
8. Menahga
9. Moose Lake
10. Pine City
11. Sebeka
12. Starbuck
13. Waterville

Grantee: UMN Extension

IOWA
1. Alden
2. Bancroft
3. Brighton
4. Columbus Junction
5. Correctionville
6. Dayton
7. Dunlap
8. Farmington
9. Hamburg
10. Hazleton
11. Lamont
12. Leon
13. Mt. Ayr
14. Russell
15. Villisca

Grantee: ISU Extension

NORTH DAKOTA
1. Dunseith
2. Fessenden
3. Fordville
4. Fort Yates
5. Hannaford
6. Lakota
7. Leeds
8. Marion
9. McClusky
10. Minnewaukan
11. Napoleon
12. Rolla
13. Sheldon
14. Tolna
15. Underwood

Grantee: NDSU Extension

SOUTH DAKOTA
1. Big Stone City
2. Box Elder
3. Eden/Roslyn
4. Flandreau
5. Gayville/Volin
6. Gregory
7. Harding County
8. Hill City
9. Hyde County
10. Kadoka
11. Kimball
12. Leola
13. Reliance
14. St. Francis (Rosebud Reservation)
15. Wilmot/Corona (Whetstone Valley)

Grantee: SDSU Cooperative Extension

MONTANA
1. Alberton
2. Belt
3. Choteau
4. Cut Bank
5. Darby
6. Ennis
7. Eureka
8. Geyser
9. Harlem
10. Malta
11. Sheridan
12. Superior
13. Stanford
14. Stevensville
15. Twin Bridges
Grantee: MSU Extension

WASHINGTON
1. Benton City
2. Beverly/Schawana
3. Big River Tribal Community
4. Deer Park
5. Grand Coulee
6. Grand Mound/ Rochester
7. Lyle
8. Onalaska
9. Othello West
10. Rockford
11. Rosalia
12. Tumtum
13. Valley
14. Wellpinit
15. Wishram
Grantee: WSU Extension

IDAHO
1. Albion
2. American Falls
3. Butte Communities (Arco/Moore)
4. Ashton
5. Challis
6. Eden
7. Georgetown
8. Hazelton
9. Heyburn
10. Lava Hot Springs
11. Menan
12. Ririe
13. Roberts
14. Salmon
15. Lincoln Saddle UP (Shoshone/Dietrich/ Richfield)
Grantee: University of Idaho Extension

Description of Horizons

HOW A COMMUNITY BENEFITS

By completing the entire Horizons program, a community can expect:

- A community-wide understanding of poverty and ways it can be solved;
- More people in leadership roles in the community;
- Community leaders who come from all ages, backgrounds and incomes;

- At least six people with better skills to help lead community discussions and move toward community action on poverty;
- Three people who can present ongoing leadership training in the community;
- At least 20 people with enhanced leadership abilities;
- A vision and a plan - created and carried out by at least 60 people;
- Up to $10,000 to sustain community strategies for poverty reduction and leadership;

- Connections to many organizations and hundreds of other Horizons communities that can help for the long haul; and
- Changes from within the community that allow this work to continue long term.

Community Success

Is Horizons worth the effort? Nearly 200 small rural and reservation communities – towns just like yours – say "yes!" Read some of their entries at http://communityblogs.us/

Delivery organizations:

- **Iowa State University Extension,** http://www.extension.iastate.edu/horizons/

- **Montana State University Extension Service,** www.horizonsmt.org

- **North Dakota State University Extension Service,** http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/horizons/vision.htm

- **South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension Service,** http://sdces.sdstate.edu/cil

- **University of Idaho Extension,** http://extension.ag.uidaho.edu/horizons

- **University of Minnesota Extension,** http://www.extension.umn.edu/community/horizons/

- **Washington State University Extension,** http://horizons.wsu.edu/

Everyday Democracy
(study circles facilitator training and assistance to delivery organizations)
www.everyday-democracy.org

Pew Partnership for Civic Change
(training for LeadershipPlenty®, assistance to communities) www.pew-partnership.org

Northwest Area Foundation
(funding, technical assistance to delivery organizations, evaluation, sharing of learning)
www.nwaf.org, 800-904-9821

"A year and a half ago, if you had asked me or others in town about **poverty, we would have said,** *'There isn't much,* **it's not a big issue.'** *Some people would have said it's just those people who are too lazy to get a job.* **When you start looking at it** *though,* **as in Study Circles, you** **realize that bad things do happen** *to people, that you can't always get a job that will support your family."*

"What mattered most with Horizons is that someone believed that **things could be better–** *they had more* **faith in us** *than we had in ourselves."*

"We have new leaders in the community because of what we are doing here. People are volunteering for things that they had never even been invited to before."

HORIZONS IS ABOUT MOVEMENT AND CHANGE:

From waiting to leading ... from talk to action ... from poverty to prosperity ... from a few to many ... from despair to hope ... from indifference to pride.

HORIZONS
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP TO REDUCE POVERTY

SEEM LIKE BIG DREAMS FOR SMALL RURAL COMMUNITIES? NOT AT ALL. THESE COMMUNITIES CAN – AND ARE – THRIVING:

Communities where families and neighbors with wide-ranging perspectives and ideas once struggled in isolation ... now plan collaboratively for their future. They have come to recognize the importance of a single voice, as well as the strength of community decision making.

After holding a "funeral" to bury negative attitudes and behaviors, a community moved on to creating a shared vision, setting goals and taking action.

Many small towns are addressing their communities' need for access to healthcare, especially by those with very limited means.

Three communities joined forces to push for a statewide communications policy to bring in wireless technology. The much-needed cell tower now makes these towns attractive to new businesses.

People involved in the Horizons program increasingly show up and speak up at important community discussions around needed infrastructure, improving school district budgets and developing municipal sewer systems. Many participants have built the skills, run for – and won – positions for mayor, school board or city councils.

Small rural towns are starting their own community foundations; locally-grown support for actions plans that will help low-income families.

Does Horizons accomplish all of this? No. People do – people who care deeply about their communities and want them to thrive. Horizons provides ideas, resources, support and inspiration – fertile ground where optimism can thrive.

WHAT IS HORIZONS?

Horizons is a community leadership program aimed at reducing poverty in small rural and reservation communities (population less than 5,000) faced with economic decline and demographic change.

Horizons explores perceptions about and sources of **poverty**; it isn't always just about lack of money. Horizons builds stronger community **leadership**; leadership is as important as good roads, great schools and clean water. Horizons embraces the **entire community**; everyone is needed and everyone has something to give. For communities to thrive, everyone must thrive.

Who funds it?

Horizons is funded by the Northwest Area Foundation, whose mission is to help reduce poverty in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon. The Foundation invests in - and relies upon - experienced regional institutions to provide training, consulting and technical support in each Horizons community. It also directs the two grants that come to communities during the program, totaling up to $10,000 to help them sustain their poverty reduction work.

Who facilitates it?

Seven organizations deliver the Horizons program. They helped design Horizons and have coached nearly 200 rural and reservation communities through the process since 2003. They provide communities with coaching and training but have assembled a vast network of other partners who help Horizons communities.

How long does it take?

Horizons is an 18-month program with four required segments. Communities must meet the thresholds for each segment within defined timeframes before they can move forward. Each threshold is connected to skills and achievement that help strengthen a community.

What does it involve?

All Horizons communities get the same foundation of program resources and tools during the first three program activities. The delivery organizations then select additional program resources customized to address each community's unique needs. For one community, it might mean economic development training; for another, conflict resolution counseling or technical skill courses.

All Horizons communities take part in:

- Community conversation and action ideas focused on poverty. This segment requires 12 hours during a three-month period and the involvement of at least 30 people. The goal is for the community to learn what poverty looks like and what they can do about it. Momentum grows as the community builds skills, involves more people and becomes increasingly strategic.

- Leadership building using LeadershipPlenty® training. At least 20 people give 30-40 hours of time. This is a popular segment because it's practical and assumes every community member can provide leadership.

- Community visioning and planning focused on leadership growth and poverty reduction. This involves the whole community. Some communities get competitive, seeing who can involve the most people!

- Idea implementation. The delivery organization and others provide the community with support, coaching and additional resources as they put their plans into action.

The Horizons program is exciting and gratifying, yet challenging. The community must invest time if it is to achieve long-term results.

To receive up to $8,500
✓ Community plan with outcomes connected to poverty reduction
✓ Community blog entries showing action and structural change on poverty

To enter Horizons program
✓ Population < 5,000
✓ Poverty rate > 10%
✓ Minimum of 5 community members attend program preview
✓ Application with at least 30 signatures from many sectors of community
✓ Minimum number of facilitators recruited and trained (see chart)

Required for Study Circles

Town size	Minimum participants	Facilitators
=<1500	30 people	6
2000	2% = 40 people	8
2500	2% = 50 people	8
3000	2% = 60 people	10
3500	2% = 70 people	10
4000	2% = 80 people	12
4500	2% = 90 people	12
5000	2% = 100 people	14

Community Action to Reduce Poverty
What happens?
- Community implements plan
- Community tracks progress
- Delivery organization helps coach and provide additional resources and support
- Community seeks other resources

Benefit to community:
- Action and progress on its plan
- Community-wide understanding and plan around poverty
- Community-wide understanding and plan around leadership
- Strategies that link action to poverty reduction
- More community members involved
- People providing leadership from all parts of the community
- New connections with organizations and other communities to provide resources

Study Circles
What happens?
- Community steering committee recruits facilitators and participants for Study Circles community dialogue on poverty and prosperity; recruitment targets all parts of the community, especially those struggling to get by
- Facilitators attend a day of training
- Participants give 12 hours (six sessions) to understand poverty, develop ideas to reduce it and take action on at least one idea
- A few community members are trained to start tracking community progress using a community blog

Benefit to community:
- At least 6 people with skills to lead a community dialogue and action process
- At least 30 people in the community who understand poverty, have a vision for a community without poverty, and ideas for action
- More people involved from all parts of the community
- Many practical ideas to help reduce poverty
- At least one idea becomes a plan and action
- Connection of facilitators to other communities

To move to LeadershipPlenty®
✓ Minimum number of Study Circles facilitators trained
✓ Minimum number of participants in Study Circles (see chart)
✓ Pre and post surveys completed
✓ Action idea list submitted with one item complete
✓ 3 LeadershipPlenty® trainers recruited
✓ LeadershipPlenty® participant recruitment plan
✓ Community members track progress on poverty outcomes on blog

To receive the first $1,500 grant
✓ 15 % of community participates in visioning and planning
✓ Identify qualified organization to receive funds
✓ Community making blog entries related to community change

(Center wheel)
HORIZONS
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP TO REDUCE POVERTY

Poverty · Community · Leadership

Community Action to Reduce Poverty — Sept. Oct. Nov. Dec. 2010 Jan. Feb. Mar.
Study Circles — 2008 Sept. Oct. Nov. Dec.
LeadershipPlenty® — 2009 Jan. Feb. Mar. Apr. May
Community Visioning — June July Aug.
Threshold

Community Visioning
What happens?
- Participants in Study Circles and LeadershipPlenty® work together to lead a community visioning process that involves at least 15% of the community
- Recruitment draws people from all parts of the community

Benefit to community:
- More people from all parts of the community involved
- Exciting community vision that results in solid action on leadership and poverty
- Plan to sustain the work over time
- Qualified organization to receive funds on the community's behalf

To move to Visioning
✓ 3 people trained to deliver LeadershipPlenty®
✓ Minimum number complete LeadershipPlenty® training (20 if <1500, 25 if greater)
✓ Community members track progress on leadership outcomes on blog
✓ Pre and post surveys complete

LeadershipPlenty®
What happens?
- 3 community members trained to deliver LeadershipPlenty®
- Community members participate in LeadershipPlenty®, 30-40 hours of leadership training
- Community members track progress on leadership outcomes on blog
- Participants help plan community visioning

Benefit to community:
- At least 20 people with expanded understanding of leadership and greater skill
- 3 people who can provide ongoing leadership training
- Core group that can organize community visioning and planning to reduce poverty
- Core group that can use blog as tool to track progress and communicate to community
- More people who can lead on poverty reduction
- More leadership from all parts of the community
- More people who understand how to mobilize others to action
- Commitment to keep the work going over time