



TOOLS TO TAKE ACTION

Resources Available to Communities to Work Together to Reduce Poverty

Can communities reduce poverty? Yes they can. And, yes, they are.

Persistent poverty is a reality all across the country, yet it may look different in the inner city, in rural towns, on American Indian reservations, and in suburbs. It may be seen in out-of-date or frayed school texts or the number of students on free and reduced lunch within a school district. It is seen in the lack of affordable housing, the unavailability of affordable health care coverage, the skills gap between available labor and available jobs, a shortage of living-wage jobs.

Persistent poverty is often a silent struggle: hungry children at school, adults working two or more jobs and barely making ends meet. It is the choice many have to make between paying for health care and paying rent. It is the lack of hope that can pervade a household and an entire community.

These many faces of poverty historically have been addressed individually and separately. The challenge for any community is to develop integrated, systemic solutions that address the root causes of poverty: Not a simple or quick task. Strategic solutions are needed to address the underlying systems – the policies, practices, attitudes – that perpetuate poverty. It requires that communities – members and leaders – pull together in efforts that may offer some short-term results, but will require persistence and grit to achieve lasting change.

Fortunately, there are communities and leaders who have taken this on. They are using strategies and tools that are showing measurable progress. They will tell you that their communities can make lasting changes to improve the lives of those living in deepest poverty.

The following pages are but a small sample of useful resources from dozens of organizations and communities across the country. This is not an exhaustive list: It will continue to grow. None of them is a magic bullet. They do require an investment of time, energy, patience, flexibility and openness to new thinking and relationships. Visit www.nwaf.org often for updates on strategic approaches, practical tools, and community case studies.

Please contact us at info@nwaf.org if you know of other communities in which citizens, local governments, nonprofits and business leaders are working together to reduce poverty long term.

CASE STUDIES

There are dozens and dozens of community-based, strategic efforts underway all across the country. Many of them are producing measurable success. This is but a tiny sample. Please visit www.nwaf.org for additional case studies.

CHARISM

Big change can plunge a community into a crisis. Since 1996, an average of 500 refugees per year has moved into Fargo, giving it one of the highest per capita resettlement rates in the country. Fargo decided that the inflow of refugees from around the world was an opportunity for growth. The diversity and culture that came with the families from Somalia, Bosnia and Sudan has changed the face of Fargo. CHARISM was established by the owner of a group of apartment buildings in the McCormick neighborhood of Fargo to address some of the social and skill building needs of the residents in this low-income neighborhood. www.charism.org

Dayton Chamber of Commerce and Community Task Force

Town meetings, extensive community participation, building local assets and innovative partnerships have been hallmarks of this community's long-lived effort. Over 20 years ago, about 10 percent of the population met to address the decaying downtown, a 20 percent unemployment rate and dwindling agricultural economy. By focusing on local business, nurturing entrepreneurs, restoring downtown to a historic district, maintaining affordable housing, and job retention and creation, this community saw poverty fall by 34 percent between 1990 and 2000. chamber@historicdayton.com

Heartland's Circles of Support

While many think money is the first, and perhaps only, solution to poverty, the people of Willmar, Minnesota know that there is real power in other types of support. That's because poverty is not only about a lack of funds: it is about isolation, lack of hope, barriers to opportunities for education and jobs, as well as inadequate housing and health care. Willmar's Heartland Community Action Agency adopted a model called Circles of Support as part of a five-part strategic plan to help its community reduce poverty for the long term. It is an innovative approach that promotes ending poverty and welfare dependence by engaging the financial resources and personal connections of the community while blurring socioeconomic and racial boundaries. jayk@heartlandcaa.org

Illinois Valley Community Development Organization (IVCDO)

When Cave Junction, Oregon gained Enterprise Community designation (1994-2004), it embarked on community-wide strategies based on developing native assets. This has included a unique partnership with the U.S. Park Service to manage the Oregon Caves Chateau, which has created seasonal and year-round jobs and which generates over \$700,000 revenues annually. Collaboration among government, chamber of commerce, business, community and schools have greatly strengthened the area's economy. www.ivcrt.org

Lemhi & North Custer Development Corporation

Salmon and surrounding communities leveraged their Idaho GEM designation to attract additional resources. GEM-based training, vision and goal development, and focus on developing an economic engine, has lead to a climate of innovative and sustainable development. The community is committed to building the local infrastructure to help attract business and individuals. gynii@custertel.net

North Missoula Community Development Corporation (NMCDC)



651-224-9635

www.nwaf.org

Losing access to their neighbors began just before World War II, when railroad crossings were replaced with a single underpass for both vehicles and pedestrians. Then in the mid-1960s, the interstate highway system cut through the North Missoula neighborhood, destroying 60 homes and isolating that section of town from its southern neighbors. Operating as an opportunity center for local residents, NMCDC promotes affordable housing and quality of life improvements that help mitigate the consequences of poverty and isolation. www.nmcdc.org

The Lakota Fund (TLF)

What do you see when you look into a mirror? When an economic development conference acted as a mirror to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1985, it reflected a community without a private economy. With a population of just under 20,000, there were only two native-owned businesses within the 4,000 square mile reservation. The image is very different today, in great part due to the Lakota Fund. www.lakotafund.org

Wallowa Resources

Economic hardships resulting from the decline of the local timber industry in the 1990s have promoted innovative thinking and action in Enterprise, Oregon. The community changed its focus to environmental management, including sustainable use of community assets while creating living-wage jobs. In Enterprise, environmentalists and land users jointly plan for community-wide benefit. Outcomes include the first unopposed timber sale in 10 years, an international study of the impact of cattle on rangeland, and collaborations across governments and between the business and private sector. www.wallowaresources.org

BRINGING EVERYONE TOGETHER

Various resources to help pull together representative voices and votes from diverse parts of a community for decision-making that addresses persistent poverty.

Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO): National association of organizations committed to micro-enterprise development. AEO provides its members with a forum, information and a voice to promote enterprise opportunity for people and communities with limited access to economic resources. Includes information about learning clusters (or sectors). www.microenterpriseworks.org

Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs: Report – “Creating a Complete Entrepreneurial Community.” www.iira.org

Mind Tools: Tools on decision-making, including examples and exercises that expand and reinforce your understanding. www.mindtools.com

Move the Mountain: Based in Ames, Iowa, is one of the developers of Circles of Support. www.movethemountain.org

National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals: Dedicated to improving the visibility, coordination, professional status and resource base of community and economic development. Extension programs and professionals. www.srdc.msstate.edu/nacdep

Study Circles Resource Center: Helps communities build capacity to organize dialogue that leads to action and change on local public issues. A new resource, available March 2006, is a discussion guide called “Thriving Communities: Working together to move from poverty to prosperity for all.” Designed for use in community conversations involving small, diverse groups of 10-15 meeting over the same time period to discuss what poverty looks like in their community, why it exists, and what they can do about it. The process builds on shared understanding and action, and leads to lasting change. Guide was field tested in 16 rural communities and tribal communities by more than 500 participants. The guide was developed jointly by the Northwest Area Foundation and the Study Circles Resource Center. SCRC can help your community use this process.
www.studycircles.org

UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNITY

Approaches and tools to help assess a community’s economics, attitudes, access to resources, etc.

Framework for Understanding Poverty: A book aimed at educators but useful far beyond the classroom walls, rooted in experience. It points out that there are a wide variety of resources that must be present for any individual to begin to move out of poverty; includes exercises and tips for working within that context. Sometimes there are "hidden rules" that make it difficult for people to have real economic mobility, and this book addresses those issues head-on. Written by Ruby Payne, the book is available from aha! Process, Inc. www.ahaprocess.com

Institute for Community Research: Uses the tools of research to build community capacity and foster collaborative community-based partnerships. By gathering information in partnership with residents, ICR helps communities locally and globally to ask better questions and get better answers about the complex problems they face.
www.incommunityresearch.org

Measuring What Matters: Community evaluation tools.
extension.usu.edu/WRDC/index.cfm/cid.747/tid.1143

Needs Assessment Strategies for Communities and Organizations: Briefly reviews the pros and cons of five approaches: existing data, attitude survey, key informant, community forum and focus group interview.
www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/tools/assess

On Getting Out—and Staying Out—of Poverty: The Complex Causes of and Responses to Poverty in the Northwest: A study that examines the causes and complex nature of poverty in the eight-state region of Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. The report argues that because poverty is complex, solutions must be multidimensional and integrated if they are to have lasting impact. This report also looks at effectiveness of various poverty-reduction efforts. To receive a copy, call (651) 224-9635 or download the report at www.nwaf.org/Content/Files/Finalreport.pdf.

Regional Indicators: Free and easily accessible social and demographic information about state, counties, tribes and reservations in the Northwest Area Foundation’s region: Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and

Washington. This tool provides access to population characteristics and data about income, poverty, employment, housing and families. www.indicators.nwaf.org

ECONOMIC ENGINES

Resources to help communities build the strategies and structures that will lead to economic growth and stability, with sustainable businesses offering living-wage jobs.

Bridger Project: A Native American case study on a community-based approach. www.thebridgerproject.com

Jobs Now Coalition: Instrumental in increasing the minimum wage in Minnesota. Their living wage database and calculator have helped some rural counties to enact policy changes that support living wage jobs for families in the state. www.jobsnowcoalition.org

Local Government Commission: Provides peer networking opportunities, acts as an interface between city and county officials, and provides practical policy ideas for addressing serious environmental and social problems such as sustainable development. www.lgc.org

Native Entrepreneurship: Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Communities: In a first comprehensive view of entrepreneurship on American Indian reservations, this report gives a new assessment of business development in Native communities in the United States. It shows that entrepreneurship is a strong poverty-alleviation strategy that holds great potential to spur vital economies in Native communities. Developed by the Northwest Area Foundation and CFED. Download the publication at www.nwaf.org/content/files/Native_Entrepreneurship.pdf

Sustainable Communities Network (SCN): This site encourages the exchange of information to help make communities more livable and increases the visibility of successful community projects. www.sustainable.org

What Fuels Economic Engines for Small Businesses?: A Harris Poll report on a national survey of small businesses on business challenges, community involvement, technology and future spending. www.printondemand.com/MT/archives/005475.html

BUILDING CAPACITY

Sources to help build community practice, policies, institutional strengths and community infrastructure for sustainable poverty-reduction initiatives.

Building Better Rural Places: This guide is written for anyone seeking help from federal programs to foster innovative enterprises in agriculture and forestry in the United States. Specifically, the guide addresses program resources in community development, sustainable land management, and value-added and diversified agriculture and forestry.

Thus, it can help farmers, entrepreneurs, community developers, conservationists and many other individuals, as well as private and public organizations, both for-profit and not-for-profit. <http://attra.ncat.org/guide/index.html>

Community Resources and Economic Development: Includes policy briefs and reports. <http://srdc.msstate.edu/cred>

Connect Richmond – Information for a Stronger Community: Description of community approaches. <http://oncampus.richmond.edu/connect>

Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED): Asset building strategies, rural entrepreneurship report and individual development accounts. www.cfed.org

Hearth Connection: Working in Minnesota to end long-term homelessness. Their development model is for financing supportive housing that can permanently eliminate homelessness while aligning local funds for greater impact. <http://www.csh.org/index.cfm?nodeId=84>

Heartland Center for Leadership Development: A variety of services and reports, including “20 Clues to Rural Community Survival: An Annotated List.” www.heartlandcenter.info

Laboratory for Community and Economic Development: Tools for community needs assessment. www.communitydevelopment.uiuc.edu/resources/factsheets/needpuls.html

North Central Regional Center for Rural Development: <http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu>

North Carolina Rural Center, Inc.: Many links to resources, especially for rural communities. www.ncruralcenter.org

Rural Assistance Center: A rural health and human services "information portal." RAC helps rural communities and other rural stakeholders access the full range of available programs, funding and research that can enable them to provide quality health and human services to rural residents. www.raconline.org/about

Western Rural Development Center: Works to strengthen the capacity of local citizens to guide the future of their rural communities. Is one of four regional centers that link the research and extension capacity of regional land grant universities with local decision-makers to address a wide range of rural development issues. Four focus areas are: enterprise development, capacity of land-grant universities and partners, civic capacity, and land use/public policy. www.extension.usu.edu/wrdc

ASSET DEVELOPMENT

Ways to identify a community's assets and then determine how to build upon them in a strategic fashion.

Asset Based Community Development Institute: Training opportunities and educational publications. <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>

Cooperative Housing Development Toolbox: Research shows that affordable housing is one of the most critical and urgent needs in areas facing poverty. Housing cooperatives are a way for local people to work together to have, hold and maintain a crucial community asset — housing. This curriculum is a set of books for two different groups (residents and community planners) who may be interested in using this as a strategy to pursue more affordable housing. A housing cooperative is an ownership structure where the residents are owners, and cooperative members collectively work to make decisions about how best to maintain the property. Prepared by the Northwest Area Foundation, this toolbox is available at www.ncdf.coop.

Enterprise Foundation: Provider of development capital and expertise to create decent, affordable homes and rebuild communities. www.enterprisefoundation.org

Individual Development Accounts: IDAs are growing in numbers nationwide. They provide a savings vehicle for low-income individuals and families. Funds saved by the individual are matched with federal or local dollars; accumulated funds can be used to purchase a first home, start a business or fund post-secondary education.

Laboratory for Community and Economic Development: Community toolbox. <http://communitydevelopment.uiuc.edu/webworks/files/index.php>

National League of Cities: Through its Institute for Youth, Education and Families and Center for Research and Municipal Programs, has developed lessons-learned reports, research reports and actions kits that can be downloaded from their website. Topics include poverty reduction strategies, affordable housing, benefits for working families, K-12 school improvement, asset building, after-school programs, accessing Earned Income Tax Credit, and more. www.nlc.org

National Trust's Heritage Tourism Program: Defines cultural heritage tourism as traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic and natural resources. www.nationaltrust.org

Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (OTTI): OTTI functions as the U.S. federal tourism office. A core responsibility is to collect, analyze and disseminate international travel and tourism statistics for the U.S. Travel and Tourism Statistical System. <http://tinet.ita.doc.gov/research/reports/basic/index.html>

Realizing Every Community Asset Foundation: Provides several tests that communities can take to assess their strengths. Also provides instructions on how to use the test results. www.tcfm.org/mapping/mapTest.htm

USDA / RIC – Tourism Resources: The Rural Information Center (RIC) provides information and referral services to local, tribal, state and federal government officials; community organizations; rural electric and telephone cooperatives; libraries; businesses; and citizens working to maintain the vitality of America's rural areas. Its website contains over 3,000 links to a wide variety of rural resources (www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ruralres/resource.htm) including RIC's Database, Federal funding Sources for Rural Areas (<http://grande.nal.usda.gov/ric/funding.php>), www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ruralres/tourism.htm