

Montana

policy REVIEW

Special ISSUE

Montana Horizons: Program
Outcomes and Policy Implications

Montana

policy REVIEW

S P R I N G 2 0 1 1

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Introduction

As co-editors of this issue of the Montana Policy Review, we are very happy to bring you this special issue of the Montana Policy Review titled, *Montana Horizons: Program Outcomes and Policy Implications*. After a long hiatus, in part because of the great effort we put into this state-wide program, it seems particularly pertinent to reintroduce our readers to the exciting outcomes and implications related to this work.

Horizons is a community leadership program aimed at reducing poverty in rural communities experiencing significant decline or demographic change. The program's goal is to help communities understand poverty, help them commit to action to address poverty, and bring about lasting positive change in their community. The 18-month program includes four segments: Segment 1 uses Study Circles that involve community conversations and action forums focused on poverty where community members learn what poverty looks like where they live and consider what they can do about it; Segment 2 involves a program called LeadershipPlenty® devoted to individual leadership training; Segment 3 involves community visioning and planning that pulls together the whole community to discuss and determine common goals and civic problem solving; Segment 4 involves idea and action implementation. Montana State University Extension coaches and workshop leaders provide communities with support, coaching, and additional resources as they put their plans into action.

Residents of 35 communities across Montana with poverty rates of 10.2 percent to 41 percent have participated in the program since 2004. More than 7,240 local citizens participated in sessions at school assemblies, special meetings, and visioning rallies. Over 1,600 people participated in community conversations to discuss poverty, with several hundred community members trained as facilitators. Throughout these conversations, we found that 87.3 percent of community members participating in

these conversations report they increased their knowledge of poverty. Action forums committed to specific projects drew more than 2,250 local residents who took specific steps to reduce poverty in their towns. Leadership trainings attracted 961 residents; 80.1 percent report the training enhanced their effectiveness in the community, 74.9 percent said they now have a greater awareness of their strengths within the community, and 94.1 percent report the training increased their leadership skills. Independent research has found that communities have leveraged \$2.3 million in additional grants, donations, and in-kind contributions.

In the articles that follow, you will read about Horizons from the people who coordinated or actively participated in all or many facets of the program. With personal insights and professional learning and wisdom, the stories, narratives, and academic pieces that follow provide the most complete analysis to date of this program from the people who delivered it; a program that many will attribute to wide-spread and positive community change. The first few articles (Anderson; Andreozzi, O'Rourke, and Davison; Mastel; Wedum; Wolery; Guay) present a broad overview of the Horizons program in communities with specific case examples of the processes and policy outcomes affecting people and places in the region; these are followed by a set of articles (Cline and Barsky; Lachapelle; Young, Weinert, and Spring) evaluating the program outcomes across the communities and region and focusing on resulting programs and policies related to Horizons; the last two articles (Webb, Steele) provide insight on the impacts on institutions and organizations and future program and policy actions and implications across the state. We are thrilled to be able to bring you this collection of articles that we can only hope, will expand your horizons regarding what is possible when individuals and communities work together to address change.

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Horizons Program Helps Forsyth “Spiral Up”

by Jennifer Anderson

The term “downward spiral” is commonly used as a reference to a situation that arises from a multitude of factors that together create an almost unstoppable motion of negative patterns, decisions and outcomes. Unfortunately, this seems to be a common occurrence with rural communities where one event may trigger an avalanche of negative consequences and despair. Fortunately for rural communities, recent research has shown that quite the opposite can and is happening. “Spiraling up,” a term coined by Emery and Flora (2006), occurs when small, positive actions create an upward momentum of success. At the core of the “spiraling up” phenomenon are people. But perhaps more important than the individual people, are the relationships and connections people and organizations have with each other. These mutually beneficial connections that hold a community together are commonly called social capital and occur in two different forms. Bonding social capital refers to the more intimate bonds people build through daily interactions with individuals like family members, neighbors and co-workers. Bridging social capital is much broader occurring between more loosely affiliated people and organizations and extends to a much larger area than places of residence.

Background and Community History

Forsyth, Montana has been involved in many attempts at community improvement projects or efforts. Over the years, the community has embarked on numerous community development projects and despite well-intentioned efforts, some programs have left the community worse-off than before.

Prior to the onset of Horizons, Forsyth was attempting to dispose of an unpopular and expensive visitor’s center that was a direct result of one former community development effort the city conducted. Likewise, the municipal pool was again facing closure and city council positions couldn’t be filled. The negative discontent was easy to see and feel throughout the town.

The “spiraling up” phenomenon is exactly what began forming in Forsyth and northern Rosebud County, as a

result of the Horizons Program. The program provided a mechanism for diverse people to work in partnership for common purposes and goals. The community dialogue promoted through Horizons created a synergy of positive work where diverse citizens came together to form cohesive groups or “task forces” centered on specific goals which led to the completion of numerous community projects. These projects led to more complicated tasks, and each success built community pride, confidence and instilled an attitude of self-reliance.

Examples of Program Success

A need for more extensive community-wide communication led to the construction of a community bulletin board. As one of the first successful projects, the bulletin board truly was a community effort, with support from Horizons and the local Lions Club. The communications task force followed the bulletin board with the development of a community website funded through Horizons and maintained by the local Forsyth Chamber of Commerce. The marketing and promotion task force developed and produced a walking tour brochure of the local historic properties in Forsyth. The brochure is now available to download from the website.

Beautification and physical appearance of the community proved to be a major issue throughout Horizons. A beautification task force formed and began assisting with a community wide clean-up effort which led to more diverse outcomes including the development and implementation of Forsyth Community Action Now (CAN). The CAN program offers local home and business owners a grant for the purpose of purchasing supplies and materials needed for property clean-up efforts. In the first year, the CAN program accepted seventeen applications and was able to assist fifteen.

Probably the most impressive example of the magnitude of Horizons is the development of the Forsyth Angela Ingomar Rosebud (F.A.I.R) Community Foundation. The effort to form the foundation began before the Horizons program,

but did not experience much success until the “spiraling up” effects of Horizons. An isolated and fledgling effort to start a county-wide community foundation was about to burn out around the time Horizons was forming. Once Horizons began experiencing some successes, the Horizons Planning Committee, comprised of community volunteers committed to the implementation of Horizons, saw the community foundation effort as a vehicle for carrying out long term outcomes of Horizons and thus an opportunity to expand the good work being done. The foundation was also perceived as having the potential to fund many future community efforts.

The family of Swede Schlesinger, an area rancher who had passed away a few years before, pledged to match \$2 for every \$1 raised. This effort was called the Schlesinger Challenge and provided a tremendous incentive for supporting the foundation as well. What had started as an entire county effort became more localized to northern Rosebud County and the communities of Forsyth, Angela, Ingomar and Rosebud. With the Horizons team behind the foundation effort along with the Schlesinger Challenge, the foundation rapidly gained success.

The year 2011 marks the fifth anniversary of the F.A.I.R. Foundation as well as the closing date of the Schlesinger Challenge. In just five short years, the foundation has raised \$50,000 which has accumulated to a total permanent endowment of \$175,000. An affiliate of the Montana Community Foundation based in Helena, MT, F.A.I.R. is overseen by a local board of directors, many of whom started their community work as participants in the Horizons Project. Now, just five years later, the board is giving grants back to community enhancement projects annually. Recipients include youth programs like the Forsyth Soccer and Forsyth Youth Council (baseball and softball) for equipment, the Friends of the Pool for youth swimming lessons, the Boy Scouts for completing a walking path and bridge along the Yellowstone River. Other Forsyth recipients include many of the local organizations like the Lions Club who constructed a pavilion at Riverside Park, and the Garden Club for a mural on a downtown building.

The F.A.I.R. Foundation is quickly becoming a funding source for many community improvement projects and is also playing a much more important role than first imagined. The foundation is building community capacity through increased local leadership. Local individuals, many of whom have never before participated in leadership roles are coming forward and getting involved. Likewise, independent organizations are learning to collaborate, to

collectively pool their resources for the common good, and nudging the upward spiral of positive momentum. As a result, Forsyth is experiencing a resurgence of community-minded activities.

Conclusions: Lessons Learned and Future Plans

Interestingly, upon researching past community efforts prior to Horizons, a visible pattern of needs and assets emerged within the community. This begged the question, if the needs and assets have not evolved much over the years, what was the major factor of the successfulness of the Horizons project? Horizons differed from past efforts in a multitude of ways. Most importantly, the program focused on building community capacity from within. It emphasized the opportunity for a town full of individuals to reconnect as a community, to build trust and cohesiveness. Thus, Forsyth as experienced an increase in social capital fueled by the spiraling up of positive outcomes.

Rural communities all over Montana, like Forsyth, are being forced to face their future head-on; futures that include making tough decisions with dwindling resources. Programs like Horizons are a lifesaver for rural residents who are fighting to keep their communities alive. Community-based efforts like Horizons provide the tools and build the capacity to empower a community to gain a sense of control, to create positive momentum and begin the upward spiral of sustainability.

References

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Community Coaching for Community Change

by Barbara Andreozzi, Mike O'Rourke and Jim Davison

The Anaconda Horizons Program was successful in implementing its goals and activities due in no small part to the role played by the program's "community coach." Unlike a project coordinator or agency director, this role as it developed in Anaconda was not responsible for setting direction and providing oversight. Instead, the primary function of the community coach has become the facilitation of ideas and directions flowing from each stage of the Horizons Program process and to foster communication between all of the community players while creating an environment of empowerment.

The sense of empowerment has encouraged new dedicated leaders and community "champions" to emerge. These new champions have taken it upon themselves to assure the sustainability and commitment to tasks under the Horizons movement. The community coach has encouraged new involvement and leadership throughout the project. The process also helped develop a new mindset as community members began to rethink how and why we go about our community business. Groups looked at the resources of the community and devised new approaches to use the resources to serve constituents. The community coach continues to help foster that new mindset and creative approaches by enlisting new volunteers and organizations.

The Role of the Community Coach

One great example of this aspect of Community Coaching came during one of the community Study Circles. More than 75 percent of the participants in all our Study Circles were interested in seeing Anaconda develop a community foundation that would provide an ongoing source of funding for programming to address community needs including the reduction of local poverty. One particular Study Circle asked if they could take the lead and explore options to develop a local foundation after their third session. With the encouragement and empowerment of the community coach, this group moved ahead of the Horizons process and began working toward the creation of a community foundation which actually came into existence before the end of the Horizons process. Empowering the leadership within this Study Circle to move forward

without the necessity of the direct oversight of a "director" made it possible to harvest this "low hanging fruit" before the Horizons process had even been completed.

Similarly, other Study Circles identified the need for more localized training opportunities so that those living in poverty could develop the job skills necessary to become more employable. After the community forum identified this need, the leadership within the committee of volunteers who took on this issue began to work on two avenues to address this identified need. The first involved the development of a working partnership between the local schools and members of the Horizons team in an effort to provide low-cost, short-term computer training opportunities. Four classes were brought on-line over a period of just a few months addressing such issues as the use of Microsoft Office 2007 and QuickBooks. These classes have led to the development of a new computer training lab developed in cooperation with Anaconda Local Development and several Horizons team members.

A second such effort created a partnership between the Anaconda Community Hospital and Horizons Team members who worked together to develop a local Certified Nurses' Assistant (CNA) training program. At the time of this writing, nearly forty students have completed the CNA training and many have found local employment with the hospital and/or nursing home.

Community Coach as a Key to Success

A key to the success of both of these efforts was the work of the community coach who encouraged the leadership within many committees, such as the Horizons Education Committee to move forward with developing plans without the need for added layers of oversight and direction. The role of community coach has evolved in Anaconda, as these projects indicate, into a source of encouragement for leadership to form and function within the community without the requirement of directorial oversight and ownership. New community leaders have stepped up in this environment of encouragement and facilitation which will be an important part of Anaconda's ability to continue these programs into the future.

Conclusions: What have we Learned about Community Coaching

The role of community coach, as it has developed here in Anaconda, seems integral to the success of the Horizons Program. The addition of someone to foster networking between participants, to encourage and empower developing leadership, to move forward in new directions, and to help facilitate practical solutions to obstacles as they develop, served to make the Anaconda Horizons Program extremely effective and productive. The position allowed all partners and participants a key contact and a neutral person who could listen to all sides and be collective and intentional about the Horizons work ahead. The key position of community coach kept the vision and goals before all

participants and community members, allowing our common ground to be the focus which minimized conflicts. The community was willing to join in a successful program that was also an enjoyable process to be a part of. Our dedicated volunteers successfully implemented our top ten goals and continue working on our next tier of goals and projects, all coordinated by the community coach.

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The Horizons Program in Choteau, Montana:

UP-CLOSE-AND-PERSONAL REFLECTIONS FROM A COMMUNITY COACH

by Jane Wolery

I was involved as a community coach with the Horizons program in Choteau, Montana. As a professional educator, I am often asked to relay measurable, impact-based results. For Horizons, we have tabulated surveys, developed community action plans, trained people in leadership skills and more. All of those efforts can be tabulated in some way with tidy calculations to be put in a report. But as Einstein is attributed with saying, "Not everything that counts can be counted."

People talk about policy changes as being indicators of strides toward progress. When I first considered whether the Horizons program had affected any policy changes in our community, I could not identify anything specifically. Then I decided maybe I did not know what the word "policy" actually meant. I had sort of assumed I knew, but figured it would not hurt to review the definition. One definition of a policy is a course of action – a program of actions adopted by a person, group, or government or set of principles on which they are based. Originally, I had been thinking solely of governmental or organizational policy. What I

realized was that any great policy change happens, first, on a personal level.

I would like to share some actions adopted – a policy change, if you will, on a personal level. I'm thinking of the messy stuff. The things that count, but are not easily counted; the changes that happen in the heart of a person. And, since the only heart I can speak to is my own that is what I will do.

The Horizons program addresses issues of poverty. I recently watched the movie, *Becoming Jane*, about the life of Jane Austen. A quote from the movie stuck in my mind – "There is nothing so hard on the spirit as poverty." Through the Horizons program we came to know that poverty exists in a variety of ways. Most generally people think of poverty as financial; however, poverty can be emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical. Poverty has to do with lack of support systems, role models, relationships, knowledge and coping strategies.

I cannot identify a time when I have felt that I have personally been in poverty. I can count many good fortunes

in my own life. Perhaps it is because of my own good fortunes that I have not always been graced with the gift of understanding for those less fortunate.

Several different experiences in my own life converged at the same time and place as the Horizons program. These experiences have changed and softened me. I find that I am now much more understanding, frequently far less judgmental and generally more open to people around me.

Last year I completed over a decade of service to the Caring Tree Project that delivers gifts to those in need during the holidays. Because I felt that recipients' anonymity was important, I tried not to know much about the people being served. It was intentional on my part not to know more. However, last year, I became more concerned about knowing the recipients. It was as if a shift had taken place within me. The recipients may have needed more from me all along than detached giving. I worked harder to coordinate with recipients to be sure that (in addition to the gifts we would deliver) they had enough food, blankets and winter gear. With the Caring Tree Project, I have long maintained that it is not our job to judge, but to serve. In order not to judge, I purposefully distanced myself. I have learned that knowing people better can allow you to serve better.

During the Study Circles portion of Horizons, I participated as a facilitator. One of the things I appreciated about the process of the Study Circles was that it helped me develop relationships with people I didn't know very well. I find that I am always a little bit task-oriented, which, in my case, can override the building of relationships. Since conversation was one of the fundamental tasks, the Study Circles allowed me to *work* at getting to know people.

I was impressed by the sentiment expressed by so many of the participants – "I've been through hard times myself and I always said if I was ever in a position to help, I would." Since Study Circles happened in our community, I have seen that sentiment lived out. We are a small community. I have witnessed the giving spirit of those from the Study Circles process.

One of the people from my Study Circle is also a 4-H leader. My family joined 4-H this year. My children are now being trained in benevolence by this person, and I understand more now about why she chooses to be generous. My daughters, ages 8 and 5, joined their 4-H club in selecting gifts to give to the Caring Tree this year. They have both worked at community service events as 4-H members to raise funds for community projects. I

appreciate that generosity is being taught to them and reinforced through 4-H leaders and community members.

Another Study Circles member has undertaken the task of gathering warm clothing and has opened a free store in her garage during the winter months. If you need coats, hats, boots or blankets, you just need to stop by and take what you need. I escorted a teenager to this 'free' store during a cold snap so that she would have adequate clothing and bedding to keep warm in her tiny, drafty apartment. The woman who organized the store was herself a single mother who I came to know better during study circles.

During the LeadershipPlenty phase of Horizons, I met a single mom who had struggled with addictions and had been incarcerated. Through her, I came to have more understanding for one of my family members who has been faced with similar challenges. When this Horizons participant was asked to share her greatest accomplishment, she stated simply and clearly, "sobriety." I am learning to be patient as I know others who work toward that same achievement.

What has serving as a Horizons Community Coach taught me? I am now more willing to meet people where they are, instead of being judgmental about what got them there. I am learning to be more open, patient and kind. I still need quite a bit of work. I can fall into old habits easily, but Horizons has forced a greater personal awareness which I know is the first step to behavior change.

Has Horizons changed others the way it has changed me? Maybe. I believe in the old adage, "learning happens when you are ready." I hope the Horizons participants learned what they needed and were ready to learn. I hope they have taken away what was most important for them in that time and space. For some, it may have been acceptance. For others, it may have been new friendships and relationships. For someone else, it may have been momentum around a cause for which they are passionate.

So how do you capture it, survey it, evaluate it? Does it need to turn into policy change in a broader sense? Or is it better to leave it messy -- a personal policy change? It is hard to count it, but I know it counts. It is my belief that the changes that are written on the heart are likely the most important of all.

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Building Community Capacity for Local Government

by Rebecca Guay

Anaconda-Deer Lodge County entered into the Horizons Program to more effectively meet the needs of all its citizens, especially those most at risk. The County needed to build new leadership capacity to help address many needs, and the project helped the County successfully build this capacity. The Horizons Program helped focus our efforts and assess the top concerns and needs of our citizens while also identifying resources and assets to effectively implement successful programs.

Examples of Community Capacity Building

There are many examples of community capacity building. First, we developed the Anaconda Community Foundation, a project that was on the drawing board for at least five years. The members of one Horizons Study Circle took on the charge and within a year developed a Foundation with an approved non-profit 501(c)3 status and \$50,000 in the bank. The Foundation currently provides seed funds for a number of local projects and non-profits in the county.

The project also built new partnerships like the one between the hospital, nursing home, job service and Horizon's Education Committee. This partnership identified the lack of in-town certification for Certified Nurse Assistants (CNAs), as a challenge for local health care providers and a barrier for livable jobs for our citizens. The partnership took only a year to develop the capacity to offer certification within Anaconda, and now six certification classes have been offered over the last 2 ½ years with nine to ten graduates in each class. Many of the CNAs work for our local hospital and nursing home but several others also work for the local Veterans Clinic and regional hospitals, bringing outside dollars into our community. Citizens once struggling to survive now have livable wages and health benefits for their families along with job benefits to secure a retirement and are even volunteering in the community.

Need for more local volunteers and leadership was another issue identified and the Horizons Program successfully launched a local volunteer center, matching citizen talents with community projects. The web-based center is now

housed at the Anaconda Hearst Free Library which will ensure sustainability for years to come. Local organizations find the volunteer help they need to offer successful projects and services that benefit the entire community.

New Leaders and Leadership Capacity

New leaders emerged to help facilitate our 11 Horizons Study Circles and teach the LeadershipPlenty series of classes. The graduates of LeadershipPlenty classes took their training to heart and shared their new skills with local organizations and the county government after graduation.

One example is a LeadershipPlenty graduate, Gary Wenger, who was fairly new to town and had not volunteered for either the county or other organizations. After LeadershipPlenty, Gary read about an opening on the county Communications Board and applied to become a member. He not only served on the board but became the Chair of the Communications Board, helping the county develop an integrated communications plan. Gary is a valuable county volunteer who continues to serve. Other graduates have gone on to serve on other boards and committees, and will even serve on the Board of County Commissioners.

Conclusions

New leadership is needed continually by local government as our current leaders move on to other endeavors. County boards and committees rely on volunteers and Horizons has helped to provide volunteers who understand how to function on a committee, and within a legal structure. Projects like Horizons cultivate new volunteers, provide additional resources to the county and empower leaders with the tools and energy to address the needs in their community.

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Horizons Program Changes Leadership Infrastructure in Southwest Montana

by Tara Mastel

The Horizons leadership development program brought many valuable resources to communities in Montana. Communities benefited from the funding and resources of Horizons in countless ways. One of the many lasting impacts of this program in three communities in Southwest Montana was the change in the community leadership infrastructure that helped ensure the benefits of Horizons would continue after the funding ended. In an independent evaluation conducted of the Horizons program by Morehouse (2010), creation of new organizations was observed in 90 percent of Horizons communities. What is presented here is a narrative description of how three communities came to establish a new leadership organization and how capacity was increased within the communities through enhanced leadership infrastructure.

Process Background in the Communities

Horizons is an 18-month leadership development program funded by the Northwest Area Foundation and administered in Montana by Montana State University (MSU) Extension. The program was brought to Whitehall and Boulder, Montana in 2006 and to Twin Bridges and Sheridan, Montana in 2009. MSU Extension agents for Jefferson County facilitated the process in these communities¹. In each community, Horizons activities were coordinated by a steering committee that was selected to represent the economic and cultural diversity of the community. Steering committees, with the assistance of the Extension agents, planned and organized all of the key elements of the program including Study Circles, LeadershipPlenty, community-wide visioning and action planning.

The initial Horizons activity, called Study Circles, generated many connections among residents, increased the awareness of poverty and excited people about increasing community vitality. Common interests were uncovered and many new committees emerged. LeadershipPlenty gave participants skills to take their ideas to the next level. Community visioning helped people distill their hopes and dreams for the community into one statement and participants created an action plan for how to achieve their vision during the Action Plan phase.

Similar to findings from other communities in Morehouse's (2010) evaluation, Horizons had a significant positive impact on the level of civic engagement within communities. Participants made more personal connections, communication among citizens increased and numerous community projects, big and small, were started or completed. The philosophy of neutral facilitation and respectful dialogue taught throughout Horizons appears to have had a significant impact on the culture of existing and new leadership in communities.

As the Horizons program came to a close, steering committee members wanted a leadership structure in place to continue the work started through Horizons. There was fear that without an organizational structure to carry on the work of the steering committee, the positive effects of Horizons would end with the program. None of the communities had organizations in existence that were concerned with the broad spectrum of issues that address community vitality and poverty. As a result, Whitehall, Boulder and Twin Bridges developed a new central coordinating and leadership organization. In Whitehall and Boulder, the intent for the new groups was to facilitate

¹ Though in Boulder, community volunteers served as the primary coordinators of the program as it was executed.

projects started during Horizons and new community projects such as those identified in the action plans developed as part of the program.

New Infrastructure Increases Community Capacity

Whitehall

In Whitehall, steering committee members wanted to have a tie to the town government as a neutral entity with high visibility and a general interest in the vitality of the entire community. Many Whitehall town officials had participated in Horizons and appreciated the positive benefits of Horizons which made them more open to the proposal. In the end, the Whitehall Town Council established a Community Development Board as a new city advisory board whose purpose is to deliberate and advise the Town Council on community development matters. The Community Development Board meets monthly at the town hall and its agendas and minutes are posted similar to the other town advisory boards. The group consists of 13 directors with officers and an ex-officio member which includes an Extension agent. Seats on the Whitehall Community Development Board are designated for specific community positions such as Town Council member, Chamber of Commerce and the Community Foundation. Included on the board are three seats for youth board members.

The Whitehall Community Development Board facilitates communication among individuals, groups, and the Town Council and takes the lead on executing key projects. Some of the projects the Community Development Board completed include the development of a municipal website, the construction of a new pavilion and overseeing the creation of an updated growth policy for the Town of Whitehall.

Boulder

Boulder created the Boulder Community Development Organization (BCDO) as an independent, unincorporated group of citizens intent on continuing the strong communication among citizens and groups fostered by Horizons. Boulder steering committee members wanted the new committee to be independent and not biased by the history and preferences of an existing organization. Aligning this new group with the Boulder city government was not suitable. At the outset, the new group elected 10 directors with officers and two ex-officio members which included an Extension agent and adopted bylaws. The BCDO sets agendas and minutes and meets monthly except for the summer months when the group recesses.

The main objective of the BCDO is to continue the communication among citizens and groups in Boulder that was so impactful during Horizons. The group serves as a place for individuals or groups to talk about their projects and make connections to resources or other people interested in the same project. To date, the group has been able to make connections that have led to the accomplishment of several key community projects such as the repair and reopening of the swimming pool, the establishment of an artists' cooperative and the focus of the local development corporation on redeveloping an abandoned state campus south of town.

Twin Bridges

As the community of Twin Bridges was going through the Horizons program, changes in one of only two local community development organizations were afoot. There was concern among some members that the support of programs by the Ruby Valley Chamber of Commerce was inequitable. Chamber members from Twin Bridges, who also served as the steering committee for Horizons, determined a need for a general interest organization focused on the vitality of Twin Bridges. As Horizons was coming to a close, the nonprofit Twin Bridges Community Association (TBCA) was formed. Members of the Horizons steering committee were instrumental in the formation of this new group and funding from Horizons was used to pay the fees associated with filing the nonprofit designation papers. TBCA founders said that they would not have been as involved in these leadership positions if not for their experience with Horizons. The group serves a similar purpose as the new organizations described in Boulder and Whitehall. Similar to the other organizations, TBCA also meets monthly and posts its agendas and minutes on the community blog initiated through Horizons.

Sheridan

Sheridan, Montana went through the Horizons program at the same time as its neighbor, Twin Bridges. Horizons went through many starts and stops in Sheridan. Eventually, a regular steering committee was established and the community was successful in meeting all of the required thresholds of the program. Three key initiatives captured the attention of Horizons participants including the community garden, the creation of a community foundation and the expansion of the adult education program at the school. In Sheridan, as Horizons came to a close, steering committee members and participants focused their leadership on individual projects rather than a central organization as in the other three communities. The need for an ongoing organization was discussed but not developed.

Outcomes and Successes of Community Development Boards

In Whitehall and Boulder, the organizations are still operating effectively more than two years after the end of Horizons. In Twin Bridges, the new organization is approximately one year old and appears to be functioning very well.

Whitehall's Community Development Board has served a valuable purpose for the town. Given this group's interest in community development, it played a strong role in the update of the town's growth policy. The Town Council relied heavily on Community Development Board members for analysis and research needed to create the new policy and a satisfactory policy was developed and adopted by the town. Community Development Board members advocated for a proposed affordable housing project and for the continuation of the newly-established teen center operated by the library. The Community Development Board is introducing the concept of an urban renewal district for the downtown area to help with revitalization after the major fire of 2009. After the fire, a five-session Study Circles-style community conversation was supported by the Community Development Board and many of the ideas shared in these conversations direct the actions of the board.

In Boulder, BCDO members play a quiet but important role in facilitating community development projects. The BCDO encouraged and supported artists interested in developing an artists' cooperative. The artists' cooperative was established and evolved into ownership by a single entrepreneur and featured over 40 artists from the region. Please include a footnote that this business recently closed after about two years in business. Similarly, the BCDO called a special meeting for people interested in trails at the request of a citizen working alone on the issue. Others interested in trails were identified by BCDO board members and the resulting committee has successfully convinced the Montana Department of Transportation to include a walking trail from town to key recreational sites south of town in a road reconstruction project planned in the near future.

Finally, the redevelopment of the former South Campus buildings was a high priority after Study Circles. BCDO received a grant from the Montana Preservation Alliance for a workshop on the redevelopment of the South Campus. The demonstration of interest in the project attracted the attention of the local development corporation as well as a potential tenant. As a result, the local development

organization wrote and received a grant of \$93,000 for the repair of the roof of one of the buildings.

Twin Bridges' TBCA has focused its efforts on economic development and tourism events. It has taken over the coordination of Twin Bridges' key festivals throughout the year. With a group of dedicated, well-trained and energetic leaders, the TBCA is enjoying great success.

Conclusion

The Horizons Program in the communities of Whitehall, Boulder, Twin Bridges and Sheridan, Montana created significant excitement among community members toward enhancing community vitality. In three of these communities, a new central organizing board was created to carry on the activities and benefits once the Horizons Program ended. In the communities where new organizations were created, no similar general interest community development organization existed previously. The new organizations serve a valuable purpose as a central organization broadly interested in the vitality of the community. These new organizations employ the good practices for community development work taught through Horizons. In the fourth community, the need was identified but the central organizing committee was not developed. Instead, the leadership focused on individual projects created through Horizons. Similar to the findings of Morehouse (2010) in her evaluation of the Horizons program, lasting changes are observed in leadership infrastructure and community capacity as a result of the Horizons program.

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New Approaches to Encourage Community Development Activities:

A CASE STUDY OF BELT, MT

by Wendy Wedum

Introduction

The poverty rate in Montana is 14.1 percent which is above the national estimated poverty rate of 13.2 percent¹. Belt, Montana has a population of 591 and a poverty rate of 13 percent. In Belt about 17 percent of the population earn “less than \$10,000” per year, and this segment makes up the largest number of households of any incremental income bracket. The 2009 Poverty Guidelines indicate poverty thresholds began at \$10,830 for a household of one. Other troubling indicators in Belt include the statistic that 15 percent of women, 10 percent of men and 17 percent of individuals over 65 live below the poverty line. The family type “Female, no husband, children under 18 years” had a poverty rate of 67 percent in 1999. Some of these situations may be attributed to an inability to work due to disability, unable to relocate to find a new job, a lack of jobs in the area, dependence on seasonal jobs, or low paying service jobs. As an additional indicator of hardship in the community, 42 residents left the area between 2000 and 2007.

Recognizing the acute need to address poverty in the community, Pastor Brent Wepprecht called the MSU Extension Cascade County office in December 2008 asking how Belt could be included in the Horizons program. He had learned about Horizons from people in the participating, neighboring communities of Geysler and Stanford. At the time of the call two other communities were dropping out of the Horizons program and Belt was included. Scoping meetings were held with selected community members and the first community meeting was held at the end of January, 2009.

¹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2009 Household Poverty Guidelines: The 2009 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia are as follows:

Persons in Family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Poverty guideline (\$)	10,830	14,570	18,310	22,050	25,790	29,530	33,270	37,010

For families with more than 8 persons, add \$3,740 for each additional person. Accessed from: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/09poverty.shtml>

Case Study Background

The community of Belt is 20 miles east of the county seat of Great Falls in Cascade County, Montana, near the northern end of the Kings Hill Scenic Byway. It is a small bedroom community with a large number of residents who live in the community or surrounding area and commute to work in Great Falls. Employment in Belt includes farming and ranching, education, financial, insurance and service industries in the form of grocery, dining and a brew pub. A substantial part of downtown Belt is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Many residents of Belt work in the city of Great Falls. Residents are largely supportive of community events and activities, but the reality is a large number do the majority of their shopping for food, groceries and clothing in Great Falls, a city of approximately 60,000.

The Horizons Process in Belt

A community-wide meeting drew 68 residents to the Belt Valley High School for an introductory meeting and description of what the Northwest Area Foundation's Horizons program was and what Horizons could do to develop the community. The next step was identifying resident volunteers to facilitate the Study Circles process and begin a series of conversations about poverty in Belt. Community members from high schoolers to retirees participated in small group discussions that combined dialogue, deliberation and problem-solving techniques based on their community knowledge and experiences. Discussions afforded opportunities for people to examine a variety of public issues from different perspectives and find solutions that would lead to positive change in the community. Regardless of age, employment status or level of education, all participants had an equal voice in the process. After a Study Circles kick-off event, one long-time resident, Gary Gray, addressed the community

saying, “I’ve lived in Belt my whole life and I cannot remember a time when we have all come together as a community to discuss anything. This is a great, first step to do something together that will benefit Belt. So I challenge you to all step-up and participate.”

At the end of the Action Forum, four committees were established to work on small projects in Belt: Community Clean-up, Belt Community Celebration, Community Calendar, and the Senior Center Bus and Facility Upgrades Committee. Each of these committees had volunteer leaders who organized and implemented several events throughout the community.

The Community Clean-up Committee had nearly 50 people who helped pick-up litter and debris throughout the town and generally improved appearances for visitors to Belt. Clean-up Committee Chair Bruce Schultz commented that he, “never imagined so many people cared so deeply about their community to spend several hours to volunteer to pick-up the trash.”

At the Belt Community Celebration, members of the steering committee and LeadershipPlenty class handed out and collected surveys from 70 attendees to gather opinions about the community in general and what they would like to see happen in their community. Twenty children under age ten spent a few minutes coloring a picture about their favorite “thing” about the community. The surveys and the pictures had similar ideas expressed in different ways. The results illustrated that by and large, the people of Belt appreciate their town and residents. They also expressed similar thoughts in what they would like to see happen in the community that would have a positive impact.

Outcomes from the Horizons Program

As a result of the Study Circles, leadership development, and visioning processes, a number of projects and activities have had a positive impact on nearly all residents of the Belt community. Examples of how the Horizons’ participants have helped improve the community are listed below:

- **Senior Center Weatherization:** The projects included replacing windows and other critical infrastructure for the facility. The Senior Center is an important gathering place for the community and the seniors.
- **Community Communications:** Several years ago the Belt community newspaper closed and was not replaced. Since the loss of its primary communications tool, citizens felt that continued dissemination of information was important. An information kiosk was built on Main

Street next to the school sign. This project has been a huge undertaking to design and disseminate information to the community. In addition, a community calendar/newsletter was created. Community events are now posted and sent home with all the school-age children. The newsletter is also posted on the school’s website and is available to people with internet access. Community members can submit events in writing at a drop box or electronically. The community calendar has more than doubled its distribution in recent months.

- **Focus on Community Wellness:** The Belt Public Schools received a Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation for Healthy Montanans grant for \$21,452. The grant was a result of community members working together to address health needs in the Belt community including a lack of a wellness center where people could participate in cardiovascular activities without traveling 20 miles one-way to Great Falls. Now, on average, 40 to 50 people use the facility on a weekly basis.
- **National speaker comes to Belt:** Students at Belt School got a chance to learn about life’s lessons outside of the classroom. Motivational speaker Bobby Petrocelli lost his wife 24 years ago to a drunk driver who crashed into his house, but instead of dwelling on the loss, he transformed it into a positive life lesson, and shares that lesson with students around the country. The presentation provided insight into responsible decision making.
- **Historic Building Improvements:** The Belt Theater Company was awarded a grant for \$70,520 for capital improvement of the historic 1916 Knights of Pythias building which contains the theater. The grant process was competitive and drew 135 applications from all over Montana. Of those, 54 received grant monies and only 11 applicants, including the Belt Theater, were fully-funded.

Conclusions and Implications

One of the most important lessons from the Horizons program in Belt was the increase in the amount and quality of collaboration and networking between community members through new partnerships with businesses, clubs and talented individuals. A common thread among the community participants was the number of people who 1) were unaware of the many needs in the community, and 2) learned they had something to contribute to other organizations. This learning was the result of the people coming together as a large group. It was not unusual to hear, “I did not know you were involved in the community (fill in the blank); I’ve always wanted to be a part of that, but did not know anyone who was involved.”

The Horizons Steering Committee has made great strides to partner with local businesses and clubs to ensure the continued growth and expansion of community development in the town. These businesses and clubs include City of Belt, Pacific Steel, PowerTech, Belt Valley Bank, Strobels Rental, Belt Theater Co., Belt School, ACE Hardware, Belt Deca Club, Belt Youth Leadership Group, L. V. Jackson Agency, Montana State University Extension, and Montana State University Great Falls.

Even though Belt began the process four months after the other Horizons communities, the residents have accomplished as much as the other communities in the entire cycle. Work continues today and the Horizons participants now understand the value the Study Circles process, the LeadershipPlenty program, and the visioning process have had on implementing projects that benefit the community.

One of the most important learning experiences in Belt was the coming together of people dedicated to the improvement of their town. The town meetings were a great opportunity that brought people together who agreed to work on common goals. The goals, which were decided upon by the community, created a road map for people to offer their talents and build partnerships, and also encouraged collaborations between the

citizens and businesses. As a result of their efforts, people and groups are forging long-term connections that will enhance the ability of community members to work together, find solutions to community issues, and establish new directions for continued community growth and success.

A concern that has been expressed, and may be seen in some other communities, is the challenge of identifying community leaders who are willing to keep the momentum going for community change. It is hoped that the Horizons effort has started to reduce perceived barriers of who the leaders are, and has introduced positive efforts to make introductions between community members, brokered new partnerships and mended frayed relationships. A potential outcome is that this 'community of conveners' will have had an opportunity to participate in a larger community vision and see the results of their actions, which could produce long-term changes as people embrace the positive impacts that change has had in this community.

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Leveraging Partnerships for Rural Development:

A CASE STUDY OF HORIZONS AND THE NORTHERN PLAINS INITIATIVE

by Sarah Cline and Christina Barsky

Rural areas occupy a unique position within the United States, containing 80% of the land area yet housing 20-25% of the population. As a whole, Americans depends on the health of rural areas—for food, clean air and water, and other such valuable natural resources. Rural communities are rich with culture, history, hometown values, and traditions. Yet, despite numerous amenities, the reality is that 48 of the 50 poorest counties in the nation are rural (Aron, 2004), and research indicates that the odds of being poor are between 1.2 to 2.3 times higher for rural residents than urban ones (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). Looking to

Montana for a concrete example of rural poverty, the figure below demonstrates county-level data for the percent of the total population in poverty in 2009.

The economic strife of rural communities is frequently attributed to insufficient or inadequate access to resources (human, fiscal, infrastructural, etc). With 20 of Montana's 56 counties reporting poverty rates of 17 percent or more, coupled with often extreme barriers of geographic isolation, the impetus for the mutual leveraging of resources among organizations—and by extension, communities—is naturally much stronger in rural states such as Montana.

Coalescence has become particularly evident within the nonprofit field—a brief analysis of which will set the tone for the partnership between Rural Dynamics, Incorporated’s (RDI) Northern Plains Initiative and the Montana State University (MSU) Extension Horizons Program.

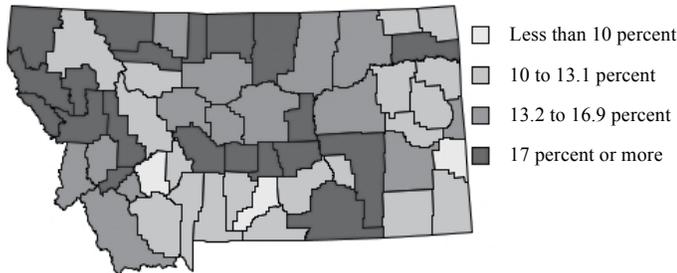


FIGURE 1. *Percent of Total Population in Poverty, USDA Economic Research Service (2009)*¹

Why Partnerships Matter in Rural States

Montana boasts more than 9,800 nonprofits within its borders, equating to roughly 1 nonprofit for every 100 persons—the second highest per capita ratio in the nation (Urban Institute, 2010). With such a large presence, one could argue that nonprofits, in and of themselves, have bolstered rural capacity. However, as always, it is not the quantity but the quality of the programs—their effectiveness—that increases capacity community’s assets. Such a flooded nonprofit sector has had the tendency of increasing competition, duplication of effort, and anxiety over the security of funding. Situated within the larger economic context of foundations curtailing their giving, rural states have been most adversely impacted—as small populations already struggle to attract investment. In the area defined as the Pacific Northwest (OR, WA, ID, AK, MT, and WY), the median grant size awarded was “consistently small” (\$7,500 or less) in 2004, 2006, and 2008 in comparison to those awarded more densely populated states (Philanthropy Northwest, 2010, p. 4).

In response to these trends, organizations are forging reciprocal relationships with those of similar missions and values in order to most effectively achieve shared goals. According to the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, this “emerging rural philanthropy is democratic and visionary. It counters the discouragement that can infect rural areas by marshalling local resources for long-term change. It changes the language from a focus on what communities lack to what they have—assets” (McGregor and Chaney, 2005, p. 2).

¹ Poverty threshold in 2009 for a single person is defined as earning \$10,991 per annum.

Horizons and the Northern Plains Initiative

The partnership between the Northern Plains Initiative (NPI) and the Horizons Program first took root in 2009. NPI is a program of Rural Dynamics whose mission is to grow partnerships to expand sustainable rural communities. Since its inception in 2005, NPI has focused on bringing together community leaders, key tribal, federal, state, and local officials in Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota to work collaboratively in the development and implementation of programs and policies that contribute to economic viability (Usera, Schulte, and Almy, 2010, p. 7). Horizons’ place-based programs designed to “help rural communities build social capital, define their purpose, and pursue prosperity” (Hoelting, 2010, p. 1) were well aligned with the overarching goals of NPI, and offered strengths and insights that balanced those of the Initiative.



FIGURE 2. *Visual depiction of the programmatic partnership between MSU Extension and Rural Dynamics, Inc.*

If an analogy were to be drawn from the relationship expressed, Montana State University would be to Horizons, as Rural Dynamics Incorporated is to the Northern Plains Initiative. The partnership primarily operates at the programmatic level, as demonstrated in Figure 2.

Identifying the unique assets that each program lends to the partnership in Figure 3 below, it is clear that while NPI operates more at a macro-scale / regional level, Horizons offers grassroots grounding in its more microcosmic, community-based expertise. The programs share common ground in the strength of their parent organizations, their cultural awareness, and their ability to undertake effective community building efforts with supportive human resources and funding.

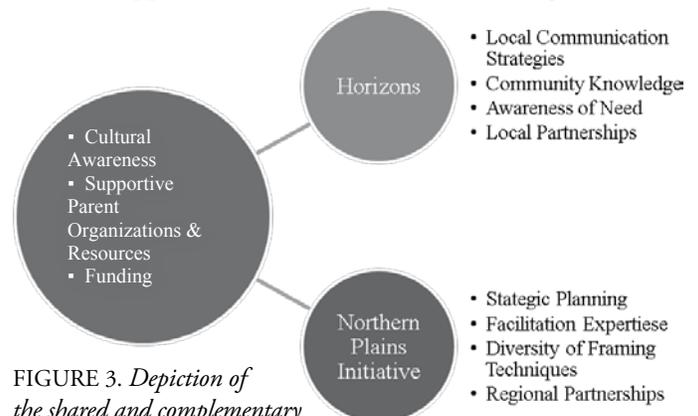


FIGURE 3. *Depiction of the shared and complementary assets each program brings to the partnership.*

The first concrete step in the partnership came when MSU Extension and RDI recognized that with two similar conferences being planned annually—the Horizons Rural Communities Conference and the NPI Mobilizing Rural Communities Conference—the organizations would better serve target populations by alternating years and co-hosting all future conferences. In 2009, Rural Dynamics sent several partners on scholarship to the Horizons Conference and the NPI Conference featured tracks specifically for Horizons Communities, such as “Community Leadership is on the Horizon.” In 2010, the first year of merged efforts, MSU Extension took the lead in planning the Rural Communities Conference, with RDI assuming an advisory role. The event was attended by over 150 participants and featured 14 unique breakout sessions covering topics such as rural-urban partnerships for sustainability, youth retention, building capacity through local food systems, health initiatives, rural housing and transportation, and more.

Case Study: South Dakota Horizons and NPI Engage Rural & Native Youth in Community Development

At the NPI Mobilizing Rural Communities Conference in 2009, South Dakota Horizons Project Director Kari Fruechte presented the various development plans that her Horizons communities were pursuing. This was the first time that NPI had the opportunity to learn of the innovative work that Horizons was spearheading in South Dakota. The areas of confluence between the programs were readily evident, and stemming from that initial meeting came the desire to directly engage Horizons leadership and allow their diverse perspectives to guide NPI as a connector, informer, and advocate for the region.

As NPI transitioned under a new director in mid-2010, the expansion of the Advisory Council was deemed an immediate priority in moving forward. Fruechte presented herself as a natural addition to the Council—as a strong advocate for rural communities in South Dakota. At her first in-person Advisory Council meeting in July, Fruechte wasted no time in determining to translate one of the identified strategic initiative areas for NPI—engaging rural youth—to action. Fruechte, in partnership with fellow South Dakotan Advisory Council member Donita Fischer of Four Bands Community Fund, proposed the idea of hosting a roundtable event in the Northwest region of South Dakota—bringing a mixture of rural and Native youth to the table to discuss the future they desired for their communities. The event was dubbed “Face the Future”

and a Facebook page was created to help build investment among youth in the 7th-12th grades.

The planning of the event was incredibly organic. Fruechte applied for a grant through South Dakota Horizons to fund the work and set up a planning committee made up of partners from Horizons, Four Bands Community Funds, and the Northern Plains Initiative. In a reversal of usual funding practices, it was the partner, South Dakota Horizons, who gave NPI staff the funds for all planning, facilitation, and travel associated with the event.

The roundtable proved a productive experience for the planners and participants and evaluations were extremely positive. One group of participants from Faith, South Dakota identified three projects to pursue—the establishment of a Humane Society, a Youth Center for the Arts, and a YMCA Recreation Center in their community. In determining those who would be involved in the planning and implementation process, they devised a clever tagline to accompany development efforts: “Have Faith in us!”

The experience ultimately demonstrated the positive impact of partnering with community organizations. Because Fruechte and Fischer had the expertise and established relationships with local groups—from schools, to nonprofits, government officials, to churches—there was no delay in organizing an event for the entire Northwest region of South Dakota. While NPI developed the facilitation, communications, and strategic planning pieces for the meeting, it was the Advisory Council members who had the vision, initiative, and local buy-in to make this event a success for their communities.

Future Opportunities for Partnership

Currently, RDI is in the process of planning the 2011 Mobilizing Rural Communities Conference with MSU Extension. Moreover, the partnership also includes a complementary webinar series—part of a larger communications strategy to build momentum and continue the conversation towards the next conference. Among the topics of the webinar presentations:

- Engaging Youth in Asset Building
- Advocating for public policy change at local, regional, and state levels
- Innovative Economic Development Approaches in Indian Country
- Family Financial Education

Looking to the future, the Northern Plains Initiative hopes to partner with MSU Extension to organize youth roundtables in Horizons communities across the state of Montana. The experience of bringing together rural and Native youth in South Dakota to talk about opportunity and resilience planning has only further confirmed the belief in the power of engaging and investing in young people as future leaders of rural communities. Drawing from the introduction to the publication *Youth Renewing the Countryside* (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, 2009, p. 10),

“Young people are vital to maintaining vibrant, rural areas. We need them for their ideas, their energy, and their ability to see things differently. We need them to steward our land and our history. We need them to grow food, harvest energy, and manage our forests. We need them to help create a new, more sustainable, more just economy.”

The success of the Horizons and Northern Plains Initiative programs is determined not by an ability to secure the largest grants, but by resourcefulness, and an ability to employ the expertise of strategic partnerships. Recognizing how economies of scale often disadvantage rural places, it is through the union of our sparse populations, our rich resources, our common goals and values that we create a collective voice for change.

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Leadership and Civic Engagement Outcomes from Horizons:

UNDERSTANDING THE POTENTIAL FOR INCREASED CITIZENSHIP

by Paul Lachapelle

Many rural communities across the United States are faced with the challenge of addressing the complex causes and consequences related to poverty. In Montana, the challenges in many rural communities include high or fluctuating employment rates, low levels of education, limited health care options (Smith, 2008) and economic and social pressures from in- and out-migration and an increasingly aging population (Johnson, 2004; Von Reichert, 2002). Concurrent to these many issues is a decrease in civic engagement and community volunteerism across many public sectors and processes. In the last half century in particular, citizens are increasingly disengaged from the day to day business of governance and from myriad civic and social activities (Putnam, 2000). Summed up more succinctly by Kemmis (2001, pg. 56), “our way of being public is a deepening failure.”

Community leadership programs have been shown to positively influence both individuals and communities with many tangible outcomes (Ayon and Lee, 2009; Hannum, Martineau, and Reinelt, 2007; Pigg, 2002; Day, 2001; Earnest, 1996). However, the influence of leadership programs to address poverty has not been adequately studied. In this paper, I evaluate the outcomes in communities participating in the Horizons Program. Specifically, I present data from surveys related to pre and post leadership trainings as well as the results from a series of focus groups. I discuss specific examples of actions that have been initiated in the communities as a result of the trainings and then conclude with a series of statements related to the implications of the program on the individuals and communities as a whole.

Leadership and Civic Engagement Programs

Programs that allow passive or active participation in community action projects can begin to build community support and capacity. However, programs must also focus on building community capacity and skills by allowing,

encouraging and teaching citizens how to sustain the program momentum over the long term. Programs must also empower citizens so that they feel a sense of responsibility and can influence the outcome. For Williams, and Matheny, (1995, pg. 62) the simple allowance of participation is not sufficient, but rather “conditions for meaningful citizenship must first be created.” Leadership and civic engagement programs are now available to build community capacity, inculcate citizenship, and promote volunteerism and skill-building needed to address poverty in rural communities.

The proliferation of literature on leadership in terms of both community development theory and application is abundant and growing (see for example, Emery, Fernandez, Gutierrez-Montes, & Flora, 2007; Wituk, Ealey, Clark, Heiny, & Meissen, 2005; Pigg, 1999). Many studies have shown the ancillary benefits of citizen leadership development programs including collective social action (Pigg, 2002), social capital and trust building (Day, 2001), implementing neighborhood programs and starting community organizations (Ayon and Lee, 2009), and increasing community networking, personal self-confidence and civic responsibility (Earnest, 1996). Furthermore, greater numbers of higher education institutions are adopting leadership education programs (Fredricks, 1998). More specifically, there is evidence that land grant universities can play a significant role in leadership and community change processes (Stephenson, 2011). Based on these studies, the notion of applying leadership development and civic engagement processes and skill building in communities has the potential to address poverty.

Horizons and the Relationship to Citizen Leadership Development

The Horizons Program, administered through Montana State University, is an attempt to build leadership capacity and hence address issues related to poverty in 35 rural communities across the state. The rationale is to build leadership and

civic engagement skills of community members with the expectation or anticipation that new or refined leadership skills would translate to poverty reduction through increases in empathy, action and evaluation related to poverty eradication. The Horizons Program took place in multiple phases. Twenty communities participated in the first two phases between 2004 and 2008 and an additional 15 participated in phase three between 2008 and 2010. The first 20 communities were recognized as alumni communities during the third phase.

Communities must meet thresholds for each segment within defined time frames before they can move forward. Each threshold is connected to skills and achievements that help strengthen a community. All Horizons communities get the same resources and tools. Community coaches, many of whom also serve as MSU Extension educators, work with local steering committees to select additional resources customized to meet local needs. For one community, it might mean economic development training; for another, conflict resolution counseling or technical skill courses.

The Horizons Program is organized into various segments to bring the community together and build community capacity. One of the primary objectives of the program is to enhance leadership and civic engagement through dialogue and action. The Study Circles segment specifically engages community members in conversation and subsequent actions related to projects that require a collaborative and shared effort to design and implement. Next, the LeadershipPlenty segment allows participants to explore their own personal leadership qualities and define community assets so that individuals and group resources can be pooled and used collectively to address poverty. The Study Circle and leadership development trainings were open to all community members free of charge. Several community members (often the coach and members of the steering committee) were selected to serve as the leadership training facilitator. A three-day training session was organized to help all facilitators become familiar with the leadership development materials and well-versed in facilitation technique. For the leadership training, nine different topical areas were covered over 36 hours of meeting time (most communities held one to two-hour leadership sessions over the duration of many months). The topics covered included conflict management, identifying individual and group leadership assets, communication techniques, strategic planning, and visioning. A formal Community Visioning and Action Planning segment followed the community conversations and leadership trainings.

Methods

The data presented below was collected from a variety of sources including from the author and from Morehouse (2010). Pre and post Horizons surveys focused on the impact of the leadership trainings for a number of key individual and community variables such as ability to lead and the recognition of leadership in others. Results below show data from respondents who participated in phase three Horizons communities. These individuals were asked to rate their understanding or opinions of the leadership trainings and related activities both before and after the training took place. Every effort was made to sample every participant of the program, however, some communities experienced attrition of participants due to time or other constraints.

Additional sampling of alumni communities took place to understand changes in leadership as a result of the Horizons Program using paper and on-line surveys and focus groups. These alumni community surveys were not random but rather purposive in that key contact persons were identified. These individuals were then invited to recruit five additional individuals to complete a survey and participate in a focus group. Individuals were sought with a thorough knowledge of the community and the influence of the Horizons Program on individuals, the community and the region. In particular, two Horizons Steering Committee members, one participant acknowledged to be a community leader, one elected official knowledgeable about Horizons and, if possible, one key media contact were sought out for the survey and focus groups. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A content analysis was performed to determine key points and themes shared amongst many or all of the focus group participants.

Results and Discussion

Responses from individuals before and after leadership trainings were collected from participants in all of the communities. Figure 1 (below) presents the responses for

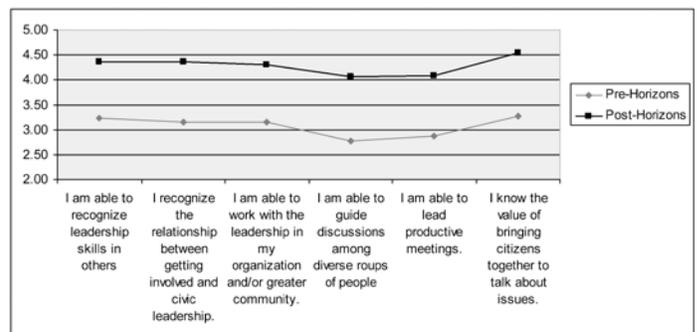


FIGURE 1. Pre and post survey responses to changes from leadership training (n=227)

questions related to perceived changes in leadership qualities and civic engagement for individuals and the community as a whole in the 15 phase two Horizons communities.

The responses for six of the survey items show a clear and positive change. The perceived changes are related to a variety of variables associated with leadership

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not sure (%)
New people working on community issues	85	9	5
Increase in people in leadership roles	80	15	5
Decisions involve more people	78	9	13
Leadership more diverse	60	20	20
Civic engagement increased	51	27	24
More people joined local groups	47	18	35
New people elected	39	33	28
Better able to handle conflict	38	24	38

TABLE 1. Responses to perceived changes in leadership characteristics in Horizons Alumni communities (n=55)

skills and civic engagement as a result of the leadership training program. Related to this pre and post survey work, respondents were also asked to gauge the types of leadership and civic engagement changes that resulted from the Horizons Program. Table 1 (left) shows the leadership changes that took place according to respondents in select alumni communities.

Table 1 shows that a majority of the respondents for most of the variables felt the Horizons program resulted in positive change regarding leadership and civic engagement. In particular, those surveyed overwhelmingly felt that the Horizons program had resulted in new people working on community issues, an increase in the number of people in leadership roles, and community decisions now involving more people.

The outcomes of the program involved both tangible projects that community members described in their respective vision statements and actions plans, as well as more intangible results such as increased networking in the community and trust among community residents. Table 2 illustrates the more significant tangible outcomes from the communities in Phase 2 communities with descriptions of the outcome listed in the right column.

Outcome	Description
Establishment of a Community Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community foundation created to provide funds for needed projects/efforts Expanded scholarship opportunities
Housing Rehab / Affordable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secured housing rehab grants Completed a housing study Committees formed to coordinate volunteers to address housing issues Partnership formed with national housing organization to begin development of a self-help home ownership program Provided heaters at no cost for families to reduce heating costs during the winter
Youth Programs, Early Childhood Programs, After-School and Mentoring Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a Head Start Program, after-school program and youth mentoring programs Town hall meetings organized on underage drinking Offering youth financial literacy classes
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering adult basic skills development classes Educational classes for the family
Addressing Basic / Urgent Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created community food bank in a handicapped-accessible building Created community garden to help those who need food Revamping thrift shop
Community Clean-Ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community clean-up committee formed Community beautification contest organized

TABLE 2. Significant outcomes and brief descriptions as a result of the community visioning process

The outcomes in Table 2 illustrate the most popular or significant programs in the communities but is by no means an exhaustive list. These outcomes merely document the changes that took place in the communities that were observable and readily measurable and that are attributable to the leadership and civic engagement that took place.

The focus group data also revealed several key outcomes related to leadership and civic engagement. Most participants of the focus groups commented on the significant changes that took place in each community as a result of the leadership trainings. In particular, participants felt that the leadership trainings brought community members together and began to build positive relationships and established trust between diverse groups of individuals. Many commented that leadership training was the basis for a community to reflect on its past, understand current trends, and begin to craft a vision of the future. Identifying leaders in the community was seen as integral to crafting a vision and implementing necessary actions to realize community goals and objectives. The opportunity for discussion and interaction helped community members construct both a new vision for the community as well as new roles for themselves in that process.

While there were many examples by respondents on the importance of leadership development in the community related to the Horizons Program, the following quote provides evidence relating leadership to the team work necessary to address poverty.

It's unrealistic for a town to hit the lottery and to expect someone to come in and fix all your problems. Really, the way to become a wealthier community is to take some pride in ourselves and I think the leadership program does help build that confidence. It encourages team work. We have definitely seen some new leadership, different people, through the program. One person, she's now involved and she will tell you "I didn't have the confidence and didn't feel part of the community." Well, now she's very much part of the community.

Leadership training was also reported to influence the willingness of a new cadre of individuals to run for office.

In several communities, new local officials were elected and they were participants in the leadership trainings. One person that was elected was a write-in candidate. And, he said "they were talking about leadership and I wanted to see if I could be one." He stepped up because he saw a need for leadership. It's really an enduring impact here, in our community.

Many respondents also recognized that leadership training was fundamental to any type of community change effort as exemplified by the following comment.

I think that leadership training and awareness is the basis for all of the improvements made and any strategies implemented. Offering leadership training was really the most important aspect.

This last example specifically mentions ownership over the process and outcome and the shared control by the many individuals who become empowered through the process.

Community pride and the idea of empowering individuals regardless of their income level, to feel like they can participate, was probably a big goal of ours. That no matter what your income level there's a way that you can contribute and be a part of the process. ... you have to allow the community a certain amount of ownership to be able to pick the outcomes that they want to work on. ... I mean you almost lose control over that a little bit because it's a community process. We're empowering the community to pick the things that they would think are important... If any of us is going to succeed, the community really has to have ownership in that. And, those things that they took ownership in may or may not have had real direct measurable results.

The excerpts above signify the support, involvement, and commitment of respondents. Many respondents discussed the importance and sense of ownership that seemed to result from the Horizons Program and that in turn influenced the overall quality of interested or affected parties to be involved in the community development proposal, plan, strategy or decision. Indeed, it appears from the comments above, that empowering members of the community in community planning and development efforts has been promulgated on developing and acquiring "buy-in" in large part through leadership training and civic engagement processes.

Implications and Conclusions

Based on the data above, clearly, the Horizons Program has had a discernable influence on both individuals and the community as a whole. Not only did individuals report positive changes in their own leadership abilities, but also on the tangible outcomes that resulted from the community visioning and action planning processes. As the data illustrate, there were clear and observable changes in terms of leadership skills and civic engagement that translated to on-the-ground outcomes and results that have both directly and indirectly influenced poverty in the communities.

The implications for these changes are more diffuse and difficult to predict, particularly in the long-term. However, given the relative significance of the reported changes and related projects, it would appear that community capacity to address adversity, such as poverty, would remain viable given the investment and changes that have taken place. Indeed, building community capacity through leadership trainings and civic engagement has produced not only tangible results in terms of community development-related projects, but also intangible outcomes in terms of individual capacity to trust others in the community, to implement programs and network, and increase a sense of self-confidence and civic responsibility.

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Improving Health Literacy for Rural Elderly in Eastern Montana

by Dave Young, Clarann Weinert and Amber Spring

Health literacy skills are foundational for meaningful health care decision-making, self-care management and good health outcomes. Interestingly, the greatest predictor of a person's health outcome is not age, race, income, education or socioeconomic status, but their level of health literacy. Health literacy is defined as "the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions" (Institute of Medicine, 2004). Health literacy is more than just good reading skills. Even a well-educated person, for example with a college degree, may have difficulty in navigating the complex health care environment because of poor health literacy skills. Health literacy includes, but is not limited to, the ability to understand directions from health care providers, instructions on prescription drug bottles, appointment slips, information in medical education brochures and terminology in various health-related forms, such as consent forms, insurance forms and advance directive forms. With the national movement directed towards a "consumer-centric" health care system, individuals need to play a more active role in health care decision-making which will require good health literacy skills (Institute of Medicine, 2009).

Findings over the past two decades indicate that health information is not presented in a manner, nor at a reading level, that is usable by most Americans and, as a result, 9 out of 10 adults have difficulty understanding and using everyday health information (Institute of Medicine, 2004). Limited health literacy is frequently associated with poor self-care management, low use of preventative services, unhealthy behaviors, higher use of emergency room services, frequent hospitalizations, and poor health outcomes. Increasing health care costs and poor health outcomes are the two major driving forces behind a national effort to improve health literacy.

In April, 2004, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released a comprehensive consensus report entitled *Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion* (Institute of Medicine, 2004). The IOM noted that a concerted effort by the public health and health care systems, the education system, the media, and health care consumers is needed to improve the nation's health literacy. They underscored the fact that attempts to improve the quality of care and reduce health care costs and disparities will fail if individuals cannot comprehend needed health information. Recommendations from the IOM included: development of programs to reduce the negative effects of limited health literacy; the incorporation of health knowledge and skills into existing K-12 curricula, and the enhancement of adult education and community programs in the area of health literacy.

In May 2010, the US Department of Health and Human Services developed and disseminated the *National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy* with the intent to engage organizations, professionals, policymakers, communities, individuals, and families in a multilevel effort to improve health literacy (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010a). The plan is based on the following two basic principles: a) everyone has the right to health information that helps them make informed decisions; and, b) health services should be delivered in ways that are understandable and beneficial to health, longevity, and quality of life.

Limited health literacy affects people of all ages, races, incomes, and education levels; however, the elderly, low-income, minorities and those living in geographically-isolated rural areas are disproportionately affected. Compounding this situation is the fact that rural areas in Montana are home to a high percentage of elderly, low-income, and minorities. Nationally, the elderly population in rural areas is growing at a much faster rate than in urban areas. Rural elderly are disadvantaged in improving their

level of health literacy because of lack of ready access to the internet, basic health information, health care preventative services, and health care providers. In spite of the fact that internet usage by rural elderly has increased from 12 percent in 2000 to 37 percent in 2008, it remains far below the national rate for American adults using the internet at 79 percent (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2009). The number of individuals who have access to the internet to search for health information has increased to a new high in 2010 to 88 percent (Harris Interactive, 2010). Improving health communication, health literacy and individual access to the internet are primary objectives of the newly released national health agenda, *Healthy People 2020* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Most communities participating in the Horizons Program have a disproportionately high percentage of elderly, higher than the overall state average of 14.1 percent. This fact, along with many rural elderly in Horizons communities living with chronic health conditions having limited access to web-based health information and limited health literacy, were the primary driving forces behind developing and implementing the *Health Enhancement for Rural Elderly* (HERE) Project.

Goals and Methodology

The HERE Project was announced to all 20 participating Horizons communities in October 2008 with a call for applications from interested communities. The overall goal of the HERE project was to improve the health and well-being of rural elderly so that they might remain in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Specific aims of the HERE Project were to: a) improve the health literacy skills of rural elderly; b) build the health literacy capacity of selected rural communities to enable elderly to make well-informed health-related decisions, better manage their own self-care, and enhance their overall health and well-being; and, c) engage and empower family members, friends, relatives, and other community members with the knowledge, skills, and abilities for appropriate caregiving/support services.

Interested Horizons communities were encouraged to apply to participate in the HERE Project and after reviewing written applications submitted, a total of four Horizons communities were selected. The following criteria were used in the selection process: a) a high percentage of elderly (65 yrs and older) residing in the community; b) identification of needs of elderly in the Horizons Community Action Plan; and c) a high level of readiness and interest from key community stakeholders.

Selected participating communities, population and percent elderly were based on the information presented in Table 1

Community	Population	% Elderly 65 & Over
Forsyth	1,865	13.7
Scobey	924	34.2
Terry	567	40.7
Wibaux	480	23.4
Montana	974,989	14.1
United States	306,656,290	12.6

TABLE 1. *Participating communities, population, and percent elderly (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, Population Estimates Program, July 1, 2009; Montana Office on Aging, Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services)*

The HERE Project was announced and introduced in each of the four participating communities via Town Hall meetings. The HERE project was designed to be community-based and centered in local senior centers. To enhance the health literacy skills of older residents, the following three interventions were used: a) *My Health Companion*®, b) hands-on instruction to increase skills for seeking and processing web-based health information, and c) five health information webinars.

The existing program, *My Health Companion*® has been shown to be a simple and effective way for tracking and maintaining health information by use of a three-ring notebook with identified sections for information such as medications, treatments, support systems, personal impressions of their health, etc (Weinert, Kinion, and Cudney, 2010). Individuals at the Town Hall meetings who indicated an interest in participating in *My Health Companion*® were mailed an informed consent form, an initial questionnaire and the *My Health Companion*® portable personal health record. The intent of the health record is to enhance tracking of their own health and health information to make better self-care decisions and to be more prepared to deal with their health care system. A second meeting was scheduled in each community for the hands-on web-based health information workshops. Laptops were set up in a local community facility with internet connectivity. Participants were provided one-on-one instruction on using the laptops and seeking and finding quality health information off the internet. The HERE Project provided participating senior centers with computers, printers, access to the internet, LCD projectors, screens, speaker phones, reference books, and *Health Hotlines* - toll-free numbers from the National Library of Medicine’s Directory of Information Resources Online. The LCD projectors, screens and speaker phones were used for

the series of five health information webinars. The webinars were scheduled after the congregate meals in the local senior centers each month for five consecutive months.

To enhance and improve caregiver support for rural elderly by family, relatives, friends and community members, the HERE project employed the nationally-recognized *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* (PTC) program (Small, Cleland, and Sturdevant, 2000). The PTC program, developed by Legacy Caregiver Services, Legacy Health, is a national program with a decade of documented use and sustained by extensive collaborations with community-based organizations. A two-and-a-half day PTC train-the-trainer workshop was hosted at a central geographic local for attendance by three representatives from each of the four participating Horizons communities. The workshop training focused on appropriate self-care for those involved in informal caregiving and participants received materials to conduct the PTC workshop in their home communities.

Results

Building the health literacy infrastructure of the community involved engaging key stakeholders, e.g., county extension agents, senior center staff, public health nurses and local librarians. A total of 68 individuals across the four participating communities were involved in using the *My Health Companion*® health information tracking system for a period of one year. The mean age of those involved in *My Health Companion*® was 64. The hands-on sessions to build internet skills for seeking and processing web-based health information were attended by 41 individuals. The mean age of participants was 67.2 years. The series of five health information webinars at rural senior centers attracted 128 participants. A total of 12 individuals completed the two-and-one-half day PTC train-the-trainer workshop. There were a number of expected and unexpected findings and outcomes with the HERE Project. One of the more surprising outcomes was that there was an inverse relationship between town population and participation in the five-part webinar series. The smallest town had the largest turnout and the largest town had the smallest turnout. Town Hall meetings were held in each community in October 2010 to close out the two-year HERE Project and to assess outcomes by visiting with local key stakeholders. Findings, outcomes and suggestions from the closure Town Hall meetings included the following:

- the senior centers are not only a gathering place for seniors, they are also the central point of contact and clearinghouse for transportation to medical appointments out of town;
- there appears to be two separate age-related subsets of elderly in some of the communities – a younger elderly (60's) who use the senior centers for early morning exercise programs, but do not participate in the congregate meals and an older elderly (70s-80s+) group who do not participate in the exercise classes, but attend the congregate meals;
- there appears to be a correlation to age with respect to level of computer and internet interest and competency – those who use the computer and internet and are interested and motivated to learn more and those who are not computer/internet savvy and do not appear to be interested in learning;
- it was suggested that any replication of the HERE Project should include individuals in their 50s as part of the target population;
- it was also suggested that future 'hands-on' workshops for elderly using laptops should employ a larger mouse because of limited hand dexterity with elderly affected with arthritis and poor hand-eye coordination;
- it was suggested to start off the computer web-based workshops with some computer games like solitaire to aid the elderly in becoming familiar with the mouse, cursor and monitor;
- for one community, the highlight of the HERE Project was the PTC component;
- it was suggested that a connection with a local high school where students in computer classes could help teach elderly how to use the computer and search the internet for health information would be advantageous; and,
- several communities were looking forward to using their new equipment provided by the HERE Project for upcoming webinars.

Preliminary results of the two-year HERE Project were presented at the 2nd Annual Health Literacy Research Conference, October 2010 (Young and Weinert, 2010). Plans are underway to submit a comprehensive report of the HERE Project for publication in an upcoming issue of the *Journal of Extension*.

Conclusions

Through the HERE project interventions, it was clear that there is a critical need to develop, promote, and improve access to electronic health information at the community level for elderly in small rural communities. There is a wide range of levels of readiness in engaging rural elderly in various interventions to improve their health literacy. Community-based stakeholders are key to marketing, supporting, and implementing practices and interventions to improve health literacy of rural elderly. Although local senior centers appear to be a central point of contact for engaging seniors, a more neutral location like a public library might increase participation in health literacy workshops and webinars.

A shortcoming of the HERE Project was conducting the project from a remote location without a strong local presence for facilitation and participation. More frequent contact with local stakeholders would have been advantageous to help increase regular participation within each community. In addition, identifying a local resource person with web-based info skills and a passion for advocating increased computer and Internet use among elderly would have been beneficial. More lead time for planning with local stakeholders would be advisable for anyone considering replicating the intervention strategies of the HERE Project in rural communities.

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Beyond the Horizon:

NEXT STEPS IN COMMUNITY ACTION FOR 35 MONTANA COMMUNITIES

by Betsy J. Webb

Since the pilot phase began in 2003, the Horizons program has been building community leadership and capacity to address poverty in small, rural, and reservation communities. Horizons was developed by the Northwest Area Foundation (NWF) based on the theory that communities already have many of the assets and skills to address social and economic decline, and with leadership training, resources and support, can create and implement their own community vision to address poverty in meaningful ways. The Horizons program has provided leadership training, focused conversation and learning about rural poverty, and coaching, training, and resources to help the participating rural and reservation communities take steps to address poverty. Over 100,000 people, close to 30% of the population of the 283 communities in seven states, have participated in this program (Morehouse, 2010).

The Horizons program was designed to equip new leaders to take community action on reducing poverty. The evidence gathered from 283 communities over five years has shown profound leadership changes that were initiated and sustained in communities. Further, at the end of the 18-month cycle, most communities acknowledged that, rather than completing their community development work, they are just getting started on addressing community action issues (Morehouse, 2010).

In Montana, 35 communities have completed an eighteen month experience that included study circles, leadership development, community visioning, and action planning. Although each community participated in the same steps and process over eighteen months, the term, “one size fits all,” does not apply to these 35 communities. Each is now positioned to address poverty and community development issues specific to their community vision.

This article will explore trends in the continued development of the Montana Horizons communities as they move towards the future with their unique visions for their own communities. In the 2010-2011 funding cycle to the Montana Horizons communities, resources and support are available in the form of educational outreach to the Horizons

communities. Each community will choose which offerings are relevant to their action plans and customized training is available to meet some of those needs.

Approaches to Reducing Poverty:

In “Thriving Communities: Working together to move from poverty to prosperity for all” (Rourke, 2006), seven approaches were introduced as ways to reduce poverty. For the purpose of this article, each of the approaches will be highlighted through action steps already taken or currently being implemented by Montana Horizons communities (listed as “Initial Actions”) and plans for the future will be discussed (listed as “Future Steps” for the 2010-2011 Horizons cycle). Although specific action steps are highlighted from participating Horizons communities, this list is neither extensive nor all inclusive. The examples are simply offered to highlight the approach to reduce poverty. It should be noted that all 35 Horizons communities have made significant gains in their action steps.

Approach #1: Focus on early childhood, youth, and schools.

Initial Actions: Horizons initiatives that focused on youth include *All About Youth* (Stevensville), the addition of a leadership elective in the High School (Whitehall), and youth involvement in tribal politics (Wolf Point). Research evaluation has shown that among all the Horizons communities in the seven states, plans in 55% of communities include long-term efforts to address poverty by focusing on youth (Morehouse, 2010).

Future Steps: Six communities in Montana have chosen to invest their time in the *Money on the Bookshelf* program. This program provides financial education to parents, supplies them with children’s books to take home and read to their children, and provides an adult mentor to teach the financial concepts and their practical applications. The program includes a series of eleven books, which the families will keep. The books alone provide a literacy tool for families and their content on financial education provides information to both parents and children.

Approach #2: Create more and better jobs.

Initial Actions: In Anaconda, a certified nurse assistant (CNA) training program was developed through the Horizons program. It has resulted in better jobs for the graduates and has been a success to individuals, families and the region. The city of Cut Bank invested in small business development training as part of their Horizons action plan. Systemic efforts such as jobs creation, job skills training, business or economic development were present in 42% of the poverty reduction plans across the Horizons program in seven states (Morehouse, 2010).

Future Steps: In this next phase of community development, workshops will be available to all 35 Montana communities in the area of entrepreneurship; starting and financing a small business. Montana State University Extension is currently exploring partnerships with organizations in Montana who offer small business development classes, cooperative business development education, and small business loans. Workshops will be offered via webinar and on-site follow up visits.

Approach #3: Help people meet their urgent needs.

Initial Actions: Across the seven states, 51% of the action plans among Horizons communities include efforts to help people meet urgent needs (Morehouse, 2010). In Montana, targeted community efforts have included the provision of safe drinking water (Brockway), the development and coordination of food banks (Darby, Culbertson, Harlowton), the expansion of availability of food stamps (Forsyth), a focus on affordable housing (Terry, White Sulphur Springs), and new medical clinic services (Ennis, Wibaux).

Future Steps: The town of Sidney is planning a workshop on affordable housing development for their community. MSU Extension will be hosting a Rural Prosperity Summit in 2011 to bring together Montana organizations committed to reducing poverty across the state. The Summit will explore solutions to poverty by identifying statewide critical issues, policy approaches to help people meet their urgent needs, and strategies to avoid duplication of services. A collaborative approach among partner organizations will enhance effectiveness in addressing poverty in the state of Montana.

Approach #4: Join with others to create change.

Initial Actions: Each of the 35 Horizons communities went through an eighteen-month process that increased the capacity of citizens to join together to create change in

their communities. This included Study Circles, leadership development workshops, community visioning, and action planning. As a result of these efforts, research has shown that civic education has increased; Volunteerism and participation has increased in 60% of alumni communities, 75% of the communities have demonstrated more partnerships, and in 76% of the Horizons communities, decision-making is more inclusive (Morehouse, 2010).

Future Steps: There has been an interest in Glendive in revisiting the process that began with Horizons and Study Circles. Community visioning and leadership development are not a linear process with a start and end point. By “cycling back,” and having the conversations about vision and leadership on an on-going basis, rather than one-time, the communities will be able to continue and deepen their conversations, add depth to their understanding, and continue to develop new leaders and action plans to address specific local issues. In this next phase of programming, there will be workshops on leadership development in four communities building upon the previous LeadershipPlenty curriculum. In addition, four communities will participate in a series of board leadership trainings on topics such as board authority, conflict management, strategic planning, and leadership development.

Approach #5: Build assets and hold onto them.

Initial Actions: Community Capacity has been enhanced by Horizons. The program emphasized the development of new nonprofit organizations both to manage the work and secure grant funds. Nearly all of the communities (90%) have a new organization empowered to receive grant funds (Morehouse, 2010). The Montana Horizons program saw significant development of community foundations associated with the larger umbrella organization of the Montana Community Foundation. The local community foundations are able to apply for grants, receive monies, and distribute monies on a local basis based on local needs. Greater than half of the 35 Montana Horizon communities worked on creating or sustaining local community foundations.

Future Steps: Customized grant writing workshops will be offered to four communities. Boulder and Anaconda have already scheduled their sessions and are currently identifying specific grants and the community individuals who can assist in the grant writing process. Two adult financial literacy workshops will be offered in two locations in Montana. Each workshop can serve over 50 trainees. Participants will learn about saving, credit, debt, and investing. Each can return home having strengthened

their financial knowledge, along with ideas that can be implemented locally. A webinar series on a variety of topics is offered monthly to provide tools to enhance prosperity. All seven states are participating and providing the expertise shared in the webinars. The webinars are recorded and available to anyone who wants to access the resources.

Approach #6: Fight racism.

Initial Actions: Facilitated community conversations took place in all the Horizons communities, including tribal communities, about issues related to racism. In addition, Study Circles and LeadershipPlenty instructors from the communities discussed the issue of racism and the importance of diversity in their training.

Future Steps: As communities return to Study Circles, visioning, and continued leadership development, racism and other forms of discrimination against those in poverty may gain more focus. The process involves deliberation on what kind of community citizens desire, and how the community includes or excludes certain categories of people (race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, family status, background, socio-economic group, etc.). How a community treats all of its citizens is a part of that conversation. The community engagement processes actively recruit all members of the community, seeking out different income levels and different cultural backgrounds to include the voices of the whole community. When everyone is represented in these conversations, better solutions and action steps are chosen that will benefit the whole community.

Approach #7: Invest in basic community resources.

Initial Actions: The investment in community resources through Horizons employed many approaches. These include the development of community gardens, farmer's markets, a farm-to-table program, biking and walking trails, food banks, a wellness facility, senior centers, community centers, information kiosks, a radio station expansion, shop local campaigns, benches for the elderly, and creating an affordable housing land trust. Here, the community vision and action planning provided the direction chosen by the specific Horizons community.

Future Steps: Communities continue to invest in community resources through a wide variety of action steps. Trainings are now planned in entrepreneurship, grant writing, financial education, leadership development, and the opportunity to return to the action plan to discuss how to adapt and build upon the vision that fueled the community development process.

Lessons Learned in Community Development in Montana

Engaging youth. The communities who are engaging youth and inviting them to participate are finding new, creative solutions to problems that exist. They are discovering high participation levels and a willingness of the youth to invest their time. They are benefiting from a generation who demonstrates comfort and ease in utilizing information technology. And, the communities are exposed to new contexts for viewing community issues. Leadership opportunities provide a reason for young people to stay in their communities and help to prepare them for important roles in the community in years to come.

A willingness to invest in the future. Communities who continue to address problems in the same way continue to experience those problems without progress. Communities who have participated in Study Circles, LeadershipPlenty, and Action Planning are now implementing creative and collaborative solutions to address community needs. As communities invest in the future through public and private improvements, the sense of community pride and accomplishment increases. The formation and development of numerous small community foundations across Montana is an example of this investment in the future.

Support local business. Several communities have been participating in the Futures Game, a training exercise that involves scenario planning for a fictional community 20 years into the future. During the exercise, the participants are given an option to invest in a big box store or a local business on Main Street. One participant strongly stated that the big box store not be chosen over local support of small businesses. He was committed to investing in Main Street and supporting the proprietors that he knew personally. This led to a discussion about supporting local business and the benefits a small town can realize through this support. In this case, the man didn't want his town to lose people, but he also didn't want the character of his town to change due to too much growth. He understood and articulated that his dollars spent at local businesses stayed in town and benefited the community.

Selectively choosing where to invest energy. Many Montana communities are facing complex decisions about their futures. Complex problems can be broken down into smaller chunks. Choosing a strategy and building on small successes can lead to large successes.

Willingness to seek help from the outside, while striving to be self-reliant. Several Montana communities have done a good job of building local assets through the development

of community foundations. These organizations allow for grant monies to be received and distributed, based on local needs and local decision-making. Communities have also been open to receiving assistance and education from sources outside their communities to build their capacity to tackle local problems. Communities are gaining an understanding of how to access resources through grants to fund infrastructure improvements and by inviting outside specialists to provide information they can then utilize in the implementation of their local action plans.

Next Steps in Community Action for 35 Montana Communities

Keep up the good work, reassess, and celebrate successes.

Most of the action plans initiated through Horizons are still current, with progress being made. Community work requires energy and commitment, and it is appropriate to pause to take stock of the goals that have been accomplished and what has been learned through the process. At the same time, the action plans and unrealized goals should be revisited, adapted, and re-written to reflect the new work ahead. Communities should celebrate their successes at each step.

Cycle back: Several Montana communities are interested in returning to Study Circles, visioning, and the development of new leaders. This “cycling back,” is important in keeping the work vibrant, developing an ever stronger core of community leaders, and ensuring relevant action plans. The process is fluid and dynamic.

Public Policy: A newer aspect for community development work includes a focus on public policy. This is an area that has not been fully explored in the approaches to reduce poverty. Community change agents often belong to a group that is separate from local elected officials. This next phase of programming will bring together community volunteers and local governments. This will include Futures Game scenario exercises and discussion; enhanced engagement of the public through the training of local officials; facilitated community dialogs on public policy issues; and a public policy advocacy module that will be available to communities.

Conclusion

According to Leighninger (2010), the Horizons project is one of the largest and most successful participation initiatives to emerge in the last five years. Leighninger (2010) adds that participation initiatives provide ideas and hope. By utilizing a sequence of deliberative public engagement, the Horizons program was successful in building civic participation and

leadership skills. Most of the Horizons communities show sustained results stemming from the participatory program, including more inclusive decision-making processes, participants who are now serving in elected public office, and a wide variety of citizen-driven activities. Horizons has shown that residents of rural, low-income communities can be engaged productively in deliberation and problem-solving (Leighninger, 2010). When considering the attributes of successful communities (Heartland Center for Leadership Development, 1987), a number of those attributes are present in the communities who have completed the eighteen month sequence in the Horizons Program. Community pride, cooperative community spirit, investment in the future, participatory approaches to community decision-making, new economic opportunities, the support of local businesses, engagement of youth, and an increase in self-reliance (while being willing to seek help from the outside when needed) are all being observed across Montana.

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development (2009) sought advice from participants involved in strengthening communities. The participants offered that communities need to focus on the right issue at the right time. Communities need to work at developing meaningful collaborations and partnerships which will leverage the ability to get the work done. Efforts must be made to nurture local leadership which will result in local ownership of the problems and solutions to those problems.

Challenges for the future of continued development in the participating Montana communities center on keeping the work relevant and vibrant. Community development is not a process that is ever complete. The need to revisit community vision and action planning will be on-going. Developing new leaders and inviting and engaging the next generation will be vital to the success of any community.

Wheatley (2002) states that real change begins with the simple act of people talking about what they care about. Community change can begin with simple conversations about what matters. Communities can start small by identifying a single problem to address. Small successes lead to changes in attitude, and a belief that the community can tackle issues and resolve them. As a result, there is increased community pride, a sense of accomplishment, the development of new leaders, and hope for the future. Through proactive community capacity building in communities across Montana, many citizens now recognize that talking and learning about their current needs, developing the leadership to take on the projects around a shared vision, and contributing to their community in productive ways, can make a difference.

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Horizons Across Montana

by Douglas Steele

In 2004, Montana State University Extension (MSUE) began a partnership with the Northwest Area Foundation (NWAf, St. Paul Minnesota) and communities across the state to address the growing concern of rural poverty in Montana. The mission of the NWAf is to support efforts by people, organizations and communities in an eight-state region to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable prosperity. The NWAf believes that if we collectively:

- Draw on the wisdom and experience of others;
- Use our resources to support, collaborate with and build on the work of proven or promising change agents including organizations, public officials, communities and other foundations who are committed to addressing systemic causes of poverty;
- Commit our resources wisely to create assets and build wealth among low-income people, impact public policy and build leadership capacity for this work in low-income communities; and
- Adapt our approach as we learn from our experiences;

Then we:

- Will contribute to the sustainable reduction of poverty in the eight-state region.

The general premise that directed this endeavor was if a delivery organization (MSU Extension) worked closely with a funding partner (NWAf) in collaboration with local communities to identify and address issues of poverty, then positive results could be accomplished. This began a seven-year partnership that was designed to create community dialog, develop local leadership, build on community assets and move a community to visioning and action.

Organization Change

When MSUE began this new partnership it was evident that system-wide expertise in working to address issues of poverty was not a strength of the organization. However, there were many strengths of the organization related to issues of poverty that were identified including: a statewide presence through a network of county and tribal Extension offices and staff, living and working in rural communities, leadership development experiences, and the full resources of not only a state land-grant university, but also a national system of institutions of higher education through the Cooperative Extension Service. However, it was noted early on in this process that an organizational change must take place to fully implement the required professional development and infrastructure to be successful in this endeavor.

Organizational change begins to occur when a deliberate plan is put into action to make an actual transition from the current state to a future, identified state. This transpires through a series of small “interventions,” or activities designed to make a change in the organization. While it was obvious that Extension had a long history of working with rural communities, a long-term commitment guided by a process that includes professional development, coaching and mentoring was needed, in addition to clear ongoing communication about the need for change. In many ways, the integration of new program activities was driven by the need to have Extension faculty and staff trained in facilitating community dialog (the Study Circles process utilized early in the Horizons program), developing local leadership through the LeadershipPlenty curriculum and guiding communities through the process of creating a strategic plan (complete with a vision and accompanying goals) to direct future efforts. Mobilizing Extension personnel to coordinate this 18-month process provide rationale for organizational change.

Changed Perceptions of the Role of Extension

One unforeseen aspect of MSUE serving as the delivery organization for the Horizons program in Montana involved a clear change of perception of Extension work among current constituents, local and state organizations and individuals who have never had direct experience with Extension in the past. While the core program areas of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, 4-H Youth Development and Community and Economic Development continued to be high priorities for educational outreach and programming, there was enough “room under the tent” to add a high-intensity program like Horizons to the organization mission. It also allowed Extension to develop new partnerships and collaborations to reinforce work being conducted in rural areas.

As part of the Horizons program, a detailed evaluation was conducted to determine the extent to which this “new” role for Extension was perceived (Morehouse, 2010). Interviews of key community leaders also identified ways in which the Horizons program has influenced perceptions of Extension and Extension’s possible role and contributions. This has drawn interest and support from others in their institutions and in their states and increased awareness of poverty issues. Observations from this research included:

- **Increased visibility within the University.** “It’s helped increase the visibility of Extension within the University and, I think, maybe slowly helped campus-based faculty realize that we’re more than ag. And, I hope it’s helping our upper level administrators have a little more respect for Extension faculty at the county level. And, having an adequately funded program has just been wonderful. And, I can’t thank the Northwest Area Foundation enough for that.”
- **More Legislative support.** “It has also helped impact the Extension in terms of generating support. Support from the Legislators. Support from public, as they become aware that the Extension Service is involved in this and we are partners in this. So, it has garnered great support as well as helped our system to make our own programs better.”
- **Improved our image.** “It’s been good for Extension because it’s raised our visibility. It’s improved our image among agency people and Legislators. It’s given the leadership of our University a much stronger impression of the value of Extension. So, I really applaud the effort and I’m very thankful for it.”
- **Positive impacts of Horizons.** “Now, it tends to be a lot of very positive feedback. What a difference it’s making, what a positive impact it’s been on the community. I’ve had people say to me things like, „if Extension would have started doing this kind of thing years ago, Extension may not be in the same situation that it’s in today. So, that’s the kind of feedback that says, „you know, this is really relevant programming ... it’s too bad Extension didn’t get going with this a lot earlier.”

Through the partnership with the Northwest Area Foundation, Horizons Delivery Organizations across the eight-state NWAF delivery area, and communities across Montana, MSU Extension has undergone a transformation to make working with rural communities one of the cornerstones of organizational outreach efforts. Through these collaborative efforts, thousands of individuals across the state have benefited from educational programming, communities are being empowered to plan for their future and MSU Extension has made a long-term commitment to addressing not only the economic well-being of families and individuals, but renewed capacity to ensure a bright horizon across Montana.

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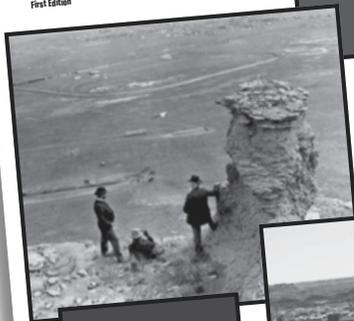
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