Northwest Area Foundation
Horizons Program 2003 – 2010

Final Evaluation Report

Diane L. Morehouse, President QED
External Evaluation Consultant

With assistance from Becky Kroll, CLEAR
Horizons Internal Evaluator

July, 2010
Introduction

While most tend to think of poverty as concentrated in urban areas, people living in rural communities are, in fact, more likely to be poor. Studies have suggested that rural communities face significant challenges related to poverty: isolation, a lack of linkages and networks, profound demographic changes, a lack of local expertise to address issues and poor local governance. Rural communities in the eight-state Northwest Area Foundation’s service area have struggled for years with significant declines in resource-based economic prosperity, transformative demographic shifts, out-migration of people and jobs, lack of sustained leadership to address issues and the loss of hope. Issues of poverty and leadership are endemic.

In response, in 2003, the Northwest Area Foundation launched an experiment to learn if impoverished, small, rural and reservation communities could build the leadership capacity to address and redress poverty. The pilot Horizons program was intended to explore the questions if: 1) enhanced leadership capacity could be built, and 2) that enhanced leadership could lead to community action leading to poverty reduction. The 18-month pilot provided enough affirmative answers for the Foundation to significantly expand the program in 2006, and to continue it in 2008. The program has matured and changed based on lessons learned. To date, 283 communities have completed the program.

The Horizons program has been extensively evaluated and the findings learned have been continuously applied to changes in program design and operation. Evidence clearly indicates that the program has been successful in identifying, training and supporting new leaders, building new and strengthening existing leadership capacity, mobilizing community participation and civic engagement. Can enhanced leadership capacity be built? The answer is a resounding yes. Has that enhanced leadership led to community poverty reduction? The response to this question is more nuanced; progress on poverty has been mixed. It is clear that the awareness and knowledge of poverty in participating communities has been significantly increased, and communities are taking action and launching activities that are focused, broadly, on poverty. It is clear that the majority of communities, some as much as five-years post-program, are continuing to work at it. Some communities have made progress on economic poverty - increasing family assets and wealth, and recent program innovations including new work in alumni communities have assisted that progress. However, others have launched efforts more broadly aimed at civic enhancement than at poverty reduction. Efforts often concentrated on amelioration of poverty, rather than longer-term systemic efforts such as job skills training or public policy changes. Participating communities feel strongly that this work is long-term and that it is unrealistic to expect significant near-term progress on poverty. There can be little question that measurable progress toward reducing poverty is a very difficult challenge for under-resourced rural communities.

This report is a compilation of evaluation findings from the entire Horizons program. It is intended to be a broad, readable and approachable summary of numerous and extensive written reports, briefings, and presentations made by us over the past four years. It is not an exhaustive compendium, rather an overview of

the most salient findings, and lessons learned. The exception is the section on the recently concluded Horizons Three, which is considerably more detailed given interview findings and other data that have not been previously reported.

About Horizons

Horizons is a community leadership program designed to build community leadership and capacity to address poverty in small, rural, and reservation communities. Horizons was predicated on the theory that communities already possess many of the assets and skills to arrest social and economic decline, and can, with leadership training, resources and support, craft and implement a shared community vision to address poverty in meaningful ways.

To date, 283 high poverty, small, rural and reservation communities have completed the Northwest Area Foundation’s Horizons program. The pilot program, concluded in 2005, involved 44 communities; and 140 communities completed Horizons Two in 2008. The current cycle, Horizons Three, concluded in April, 2010, with 99 communities completing the entire program sequence. Communities are shown in the map below.

A Brief History of Horizons

Horizons One. The program was first launched as a pilot in 2003, with 36 communities working together in clusters of three. Later, 8 additional communities were added for a much shorter and more intensive version of the program, called mini-Horizons. Participating communities ranged in size from 100 – 4800, and poverty rates ranged from 10% to 95%. The pilot was delivered by 11 partner organizations, including two Tribal Colleges and a nonprofit representing Northwest Indian tribal governments. The Foundation was directly involved in community selection and in program delivery. A total of 15,572 persons were involved.
The Theory of Change under study in the pilot was “If we improve leadership systems within small rural communities, communities will be able to take action on poverty reduction.” Leadership development was the emphasis and LeadershipPlenty® was the core component. Following the pilot, the Northwest Area Foundation staff and Delivery Organizations engaged in a period of reflection, a review of findings and lessons learned, and a significant redesign of the program’s approach, design and structure.

**Horizons Two.** Horizons Two, built from the experiences and lessons of the pilot, was a significant expansion of the program, beginning with 163 communities in seven states. As noted, 140 communities completed the structured program sequence. Communities ranged in size from 100 to 4988, and poverty rates ranged from 10% to 78%. A total of 55,144 persons participated in one or more of the program segments. They were coached by eight Delivery Organizations, including one Tribal College.

The lesson learned in the pilot was that the Theory of Change was only partially accurate, in that leadership training alone was not sufficient to move communities to action on poverty. More emphasis on poverty was needed to move communities to action on poverty. As a result, the Study Circles component – a structured community discussion focused on poverty - was added to assist communities in discussing, understanding and beginning to identify community actions to address poverty. The Theory of Change shifted to this: “Focusing small rural communities on poverty reduction and enhancing their leadership systems will result in community action on poverty.”

Another lesson learned was that while all pilot communities made some progress, a clear and focused sequence of activities was needed to move communities to action more quickly. As a result, the program curriculum was redesigned as a sequenced set of activities with clear expectations for participation and accomplishment. These expectations, known as thresholds, had to be met before communities were permitted to move on to the next segment and/or to receive grant support from the Foundation through regional and community foundations. The number of Delivery Organizations was reduced to eight, all higher education institutions: seven state Extension Services and one Tribal College. A description of the curriculum, program timeline and thresholds appears in Appendix One.

**Horizons Three.** In Horizons Three, seven Delivery Organizations worked with a smaller number of communities. Each began with 15 communities, with the exception of Minnesota which started the sequence with 13 communities. A total of 103 communities began the program and 99 completed and 30,318 persons participated. The program structure (see Appendix One) remained largely unchanged, although there were continued programmatic changes based on evaluation findings. Changes included: a greater emphasis on poverty and actions to address poverty, an effort to more directly link the program components and to build in action items, and some greater emphasis on regional training, networking and community partnerships.

### Essential Elements of Horizons 2003 - 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Change</td>
<td>“If we improve leadership systems within small rural communities, the communities will be able to take action on poverty reduction”</td>
<td>“Focusing small rural communities on poverty reduction and enhancing their leadership systems will result in community action on poverty”</td>
<td>“Focusing small rural communities on poverty reduction and enhancing their leadership systems will result in community action on poverty”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Sequence</td>
<td>LeadershipPlenty®, coaching</td>
<td>Study Circles (poverty), LeadershipPlenty®, community visioning, coaching and action</td>
<td>Study Circles (poverty), LeadershipPlenty®, community visioning, coaching and action – with some emphasis on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delivery Organizations</td>
<td>Number of Communities</td>
<td>Number of Reservation Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 (3 elected not to continue)</td>
<td>44 (36 and 8 in Mini-Horizons)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 (1 did not continue)</td>
<td>163 (140 completed 85% completion rate)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>103 (99 completed 96% completion rate)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional or statewide training
Overall Summary of External Evaluation Findings
Horizons 2005 – 2010

Overview

Since the pilot phase beginning in 2003, 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, have participated in this program.

Extensive evaluation has documented consistent and significant growth in community leadership, expanded participation in civic life and community decision-making by often previously disenfranchised groups, and dramatically increased civic engagement. Communities have embarked on, and have continued, a substantial number of actions, focusing on youth, jobs and economic development, adult and community education, community communication, and a variety of ways to ameliorate poverty, along with more general civic enhancement activities less directly focused on poverty reduction.

Community awareness of poverty has been very much increased; most communities embarked on Horizons without knowing much about the causes, consequences or realities of poverty. The program changed that, and is continuing to change sometimes entrenched attitudes about those who live in poverty. And while progress on poverty has been mixed at best, there are indications that a greater emphasis on poverty, economic poverty specifically, in the current cycle has led to more focused activity aimed at increasing family assets. Alumni communities reported that they have continued community conversations about poverty, and half are continuing to implement the plan developed during Horizons. In many communities, these plans have continued to unfold over five years.

Participating communities have created nonprofit organizations and enhanced community partnerships to assist them in this process, and have, to date, leveraged over $21,000,000 in grant funds. By any measure, this is significant structural change.

Communities believe that Horizons was, for them and for the Foundation, a long-term commitment and investment. At the end of the 18-month program, most communities said that they were “just getting traction.” Communities asserted that they have made some progress toward poverty reduction, but most believe that it is too soon to judge progress or measure outcomes. Participants acknowledged the magnitude of the task, but insisted that there will be a return on investment in the form of measurable poverty reduction and sustained leadership changes. That change, most suggested, will take more than five years. Clearly Horizons communities are still working toward those outcomes.

The key findings from the Horizons experiment are summarized below, and in detail in subsequent sections of, and in several appendices to, this report.
Overarching Findings

Significant Community Mobilization

High Completion Rates

Outcomes – Leadership

Changes in Leadership
Leadership Capacity Building
Leadership Skill Gains
Sustained Leadership Changes

Outcomes – Community Capacity

Increased Civic Engagement
New Leaders in Elective Office
Getting Things Done
Sustained Community Activity
Sustained Structural Changes

Outcomes – Poverty

Changed Attitudes, New Knowledge and Understanding
Mixed Progress
Broad Definitions
Increasing Emphasis
Sustained Activity

Outcomes – Delivery Organizations

Work with Communities
Changed Reward Structures
Focus on Poverty
Continued Focus

High Completion Rates. Horizons is a long program (18 months), with rigorous participation and accountability thresholds. Even so, communities met those thresholds and completed the program at very high rates. The overall completion rate was 91%; considerably and significantly above the Foundation staff’s original estimate of 50%. Communities told us repeatedly that they were determined to meet the thresholds and complete the program. In extended interviews in Horizons Two and Three, communities reported that the program was worth their investments of time and skill, and 88% said they would “do it again.”

Outcomes - Leadership

Changes in Leadership and Leadership Capacity-Building. Without question, Horizons has had a significant, and apparently lasting, impact on community leadership. In each program phase, the Horizons program has engaged in identifying and preparing new community leaders. In general, participants in LeadershipPlenty® and in the Study Circles process have been persons either new to the community, or new to community leadership, and certainly new to work on advocacy or civic improvement. Moreover, the program has continued to demonstrate success in identifying a diverse group of leaders, representative of the entire community.
community, including substantial numbers of young people. Overall, only about 14% of participants initially described themselves as persons who make community decisions.

**Leadership Skill Gains.** The program has also demonstrated its efficacy in providing participants with new knowledge and new leadership skills. Throughout, participants have evidenced statistically significant growth in leadership skill. This pattern of growth has been consistent over time, but the gains were larger in the most recent phase, Horizons Three. This is a strong indication of mature and more effective program delivery. It has also been significant that the strongest gains have been consistently registered on knowledge and skill items that closely parallel the over-arching goals of Horizons – working on community development issues, working with groups and group process, implementing community change and action efforts. These data, highlighting the increased gains in Horizons Three, are shown in the following graphic.

![Gains in Self-Rating of Leadership Skills from LeadershipPlenty Post-Surveys Horizons 2 and Horizons 3](image)

**Sustained Leadership Changes Over Time.** Not only are leadership knowledge and skill development among the strongest outcomes of Horizons, but these changes have persisted over time.

- In 86% of alumni communities, there are new people playing leadership roles
- In 87% of alumni communities, the number of people in leadership has increased
- In 76% of alumni communities, decision-making is now more inclusive, involving more people in discussions and decision-making
- In well over half of the alumni communities (63%) community leadership has become more diverse, including people from all demographic sectors

**Outcomes – Community Capacity**

**Increased Civic Engagement.** Horizons has had an impact not just on Horizons-related projects, but also on other efforts in the community. Repeatedly, participants spoke in interviews of greater attendance at city council and school board meetings, more participation on local boards and civic organizations and more volunteerism. In general there has been more interest and more participation in civic affairs, again, largely from those who had not previously been active. Board and civic organization participation has increased in 39% of alumni communities, and volunteerism and participation has increased in 60%. Most said this was a huge
change; people had never before attended council or other meetings unless they had some kind of grievance. This pattern of increased civic engagement has been both strong and consistent. It is one of the more significant outcomes of the program.

New Leaders in Elective Office. In addition to more participation on local boards and organizations, there has been what some called a kind of renaissance in elected leadership. In 34% of Horizons alumni communities, persons new to leadership have been elected to a variety of local offices. In a recent round of focus group interviews with Horizons alumni communities, we learned of six communities (24% of those interviewed) in which people were either running for office or had been elected in the fall 2009 elections. Many of these new elected officials were Horizons participants. This was a significant change in Horizons communities, and while comparative data are not available, it appears to be a very high level of electoral participation.

Getting Things Done. In general, participants in the Horizons program have reported that things are “getting done” in communities which had previously stagnated and lost hope. People have begun to see Horizons participants as a group to go to for change, and the program itself as the source of change. One Horizons Three participant put it this way: “We have lived here for eight years and they’ve been talking about ‘somebody’s got to do something’ for eight years. And now, in eighteen months, somebody has done something.”

Sustained Community Activity. Horizons communities have launched, and continue to implement, a wide variety of community enhancement activities; some, but not all, focused on poverty reduction. Analyses of community visioning plans indicated that every community was engaged in more than one action item. In Horizons Two, the average was 12.9 per community; in Horizons Three the average was 4.6. Most communities developed four-six ongoing work groups.

The largest categories of community activity have been: economic and job development, community cleanup programs, adult and community education, youth programs, community celebrations, recreational activities and community gatherings, community centers and gathering places. In Horizons Three there was considerable emphasis on community gardens and farmer’s markets. Many communities have focused their efforts on a wide variety of clean-up and community beautification efforts. A fairly substantial number of communities are providing resource directories or resource centers through which people can be matched with available services. A number of communities have focused on housing issues, mostly providing home fix-up and repair, but with some focus on the availability of affordable housing. Many communities have started and are endowing community foundations which will ultimately allow a source of capital for ongoing poverty and community improvement efforts. The “Top Ten” community enhancement activities by program segment are below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Horizons Two</th>
<th>Horizons Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business/Job Development</td>
<td>Adult and community Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Clean Up and Beautification</td>
<td>Business/Job Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Services</td>
<td>Community Clean Up and Beautification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult &amp; Community Education</td>
<td>Community Gardens/Farmers Markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Promotion</td>
<td>Community Resource Directory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Communication, Internal</td>
<td>Food pantries/food programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Safety</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Gatherings/Recreation</td>
<td>Community Centers/Gathering Places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Youth Recreation/after school programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Centers/Gathering Places</td>
<td>Community Gatherings/Recreation/Events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Difference in both plan format and content and analysis make precise comparison of Horizons Two and Three action plans difficult. Planning formats were substantially changed in Horizons Three, with multiple action items often grouped together. Activity numbers are likely artificially reduced.
**Sustained Structural Changes in Horizons Communities.** Communities clearly cannot continue to sustain the efforts launched during the program without financial and technical support. The program has emphasized assisting communities in finding or creating 501(c) 3 organizations to both manage and financially support the work, in creating partnerships to support the work, and in securing grant funds. Communities have made substantial progress in building community structures, and ongoing partnerships with nonprofit groups, with state and federal agencies, and with Delivery Organizations. It is highly significant that communities have thus far raised a total of $21,613,409 in grant funds or local fundraising. By any account, that is a significant amount of money invested in small (under 5000) rural communities for work to build community and address poverty.

- In 90% of Horizons alumni communities there is now an organization empowered to receive grant funds and to manage and support the ongoing community work.
- In 75% of communities there are more partnerships among local organizations
- 71% of communities have forged continuing partnerships with Delivery Organizations
- Grant funds, in addition to those provided by the Northwest Area Foundation, have been received by 60% of alumni communities to aid in implementing their community plans
- Significantly, grant support generated for purposes related to Horizons or because of the capacity built during Horizons has been large. A total of $21,613,409 in grants has been documented.
- Nearly half (46%) of Horizons alumni communities have developed new partnerships with state or regional nonprofit groups to help implement or support the community poverty reduction plan

**Outcomes - Poverty**

**Changed Attitudes, New Knowledge and Understanding of Poverty.** All of our findings confirmed that the process of democratic dialogue experienced in the Study Circles process, added after the pilot, was a very powerful experience. Many said that this was the first time they had thought about, much less discussed, poverty. Many had misconceptions and stereotypes about the rural poverty in their midst. Interviews confirmed that the dialogue was in many ways pivotal in building acknowledgement of the existence of poverty, and a new awareness of the complicated and multi-faceted nature of community poverty. As the graphic above indicates, over 17,000 people, including over 200 trained facilitators, had this experience of learning about poverty. Again, simply in terms of outputs, this was a significant level of participation in a process that has had profound impacts on understanding of poverty.

Data clearly substantiated new awareness and growth in knowledge about poverty from the beginning to the end of the Study Circles process. On each of the criteria measured in our surveys, participants registered statistically significant self-reported growth in knowledge of poverty. These gains have been remarkably consistent over time, confirming the instructional value of Study Circles. The strongest gains were registered on the causes of poverty, kinds of poverty and reasons it is hard to get out of poverty. The data from Horizons Two and Horizons Three are shown in the graph on page ten.
Importantly, too, participants provided data indicating a sense of optimism about their collective ability both to make a positive difference in the community and to reduce community poverty. Clearly the Study Circles discussions change knowledge, attitudes, and create a sense of agency to address community poverty.

**Poverty Focus Has Been Very Broad.** As has been reported with frequency, communities clearly mastered the concept of poverty as having many causes and many solutions. In interviews, participants consistently spoke of coming to understand that poverty is “about more than money.” Consistent with the definitions provided in the Study Circles guide, communities defined poverty very broadly to include culture, communications, social networks, recreation and fitness, community connectedness, and pride of place among others. Paralleling those definitions, as well as the action steps defined in the Study Circles guide, were wide-ranging community plans which, while they have not always focused on economic poverty or systemic solutions, clearly addressed poverty as the community learned to see it. In Horizons Two, we concluded, generously, that 59% of the community plans had a “reasonable linkage to poverty reduction.”

As has been reported with some frequency, there was evidence to suggest that in Horizons Two, communities were sometimes counseled not to focus on economic development or other systemic efforts that might increase wages, expand savings or in other ways move families out of poverty. And there is very little evidence that Horizons communities were acquainted with asset and wealth development tools and strategies, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), that help move families out of poverty.

**Progress on Poverty Has Been Mixed.** We have concluded that progress on addressing poverty in Horizons communities has been mixed. Some communities have focused on, and had success in, such areas as affordable housing and jobs creation. Others are continuing to take what they have called “baby steps.”

It should be emphasized that the program’s Theory of Change hypothesized that communities would “take action on poverty.” It did not necessarily envision measurable progress on poverty reduction. Given what we have continually described as the relative lack of program emphasis on economic poverty, particularly on replicable tools, models and strategies, as well as what communities termed “unclear expectations” for poverty reduction, we have come to believe that it is significant that 40% of the alumni communities are working toward systemic poverty reduction or on building family assets and wealth. Data over time have indicated that
this is a kind of developmental process, requiring first awareness, second knowledge, third action, and only later focused action. In a pilot program implemented in Horizons Two alumni communities in two states this year, RuFES, we learned that communities were only now ready, after three years, to tackle the larger, longer-term and potentially more effective poverty reduction strategies. We have concluded, along with Horizons alumni communities, that this process is a long-term one, and will take time to achieve measurable or hard results. We have also concluded that it is a difficult challenge for small, rural and under-resourced communities to tackle intractable issues, and we agree with them that they will need continuing assistance to do so.

Increasing Emphasis on Poverty: During the most recent program cycle, the number of activities with a direct linkage to poverty increased substantially. Analysis of visioning plans indicated that 68% could be “reasonably linked” to poverty, compared to 59% in Horizons Two. We believe this was reflective of continued efforts on the part of Delivery Organizations to focus more directly on economic poverty, a new initiative in two states focusing on economic poverty, and a greater emphasis on sharing tools and strategies. A significant majority of Horizons Three communities are working on one or more of the Northwest Area Foundation’s new strategic goals for poverty reduction. Seventy seven (77%) communities are working on one or more projects in: jobs and economic development, adult and community education, entrepreneurship and/or microenterprise development, housing, transportation or other ways to create assets and build family wealth

Alumni Communities are Continuing to Implement Plans. Over half, 55%, of all Horizons alumni communities are continuing work on their plans, often described to us as long-term. Data derived from a survey of communities conducted in late 2009, five years from the conclusion of Horizons One, and almost two years from the conclusion of Horizons Two, indicated the following:

- 55% of communities are reducing poverty by focusing on children and youth
- 51% are ameliorating poverty by helping people meet urgent needs such as food, clothing, etc.
- 40% of the Horizons alumni communities are working toward some kind of systemic poverty reduction efforts such as jobs creation, job skills training efforts, micro-enterprise or other business development

Theory of Change. These data do validate the Horizons Theory of Change. Focusing a community on poverty, building knowledge and understanding, and providing leadership skill training, does lead to action on poverty. We have concluded that still greater focus on tools and strategies to address systemic poverty issues would lead to additional action and greater progress.

Outcomes - Changed Delivery Institutions

Data gathered over the past five years substantiated that Delivery Organizations were also changed by this program, some called it transformed. Extension Delivery Organizations have changed the ways they work with communities and the ways they reward faculty and staff. Land-grant Universities have attached new priority to addressing poverty and that emphasis has infused other colleges and disciplines. Importantly, institutions have been recognized by key state decision-makers for their work in Horizons which itself has attracted considerable attention. All will continue the work of Horizons, even in the face of significant budget cuts.

Work with Communities. Horizons has changed (in some cases transformed) how Extension works with communities. In virtually every Delivery Organization, those interviewed talked about how they had moved beyond the traditional expert delivery of information to selected audiences to learning how to work in partnership with the entirety of a community

Changed Reward Structures. Horizons involvement has changed expectations of faculty and staff. This includes changes in desired and rewarded skills and orientation toward community

New Priority on Poverty. The emphasis on poverty in the Horizons program has created changes at all of the Delivery Organizations. There is evidence that the emphasis on poverty has infused Extension, as well as
changing how others perceive Extension as a possible resource in poverty reduction work. The emphasis on poverty has also permeated other parts of the Delivery Organizations, leading to new attention and emphasis on poverty in broader forums.

**Rethinking Outreach.** Overall, experience with the Horizons program has had an impact on a number of the Delivery Organizations, instigating rethinking and shaping new ways to conduct community engagement. There is also acknowledgement that lessons learned from Horizons have been carried over to enhanced and increased work with communities in other parts of the extension or university programs

**Continuing the Work of Horizons.** Although all of the participating Delivery Organizations are facing serious budget challenges, all would continue the work begun in Horizons. Leaders at each of the Delivery Organizations, including senior University administrators and Extension heads, could identify lasting effects of their work in Horizons. At the same time that leaders indicate the work would continue, they acknowledged that current budget constraints and the loss of NWAF funding would limit the program in certain ways.
Findings and Lessons Horizons One

As noted, the Horizons pilot involved 44 small, rural and reservation communities. A total of 36 communities, working in clusters of three, completed an 18-month leadership training and action planning sequence. Later, eight communities participated in a much shorter and more intensive version of Horizons, referred to as mini-Horizons. This was an experiment for the Northwest Area Foundation to ascertain whether small, rural communities could alter their leadership systems and structures, build on community assets, and begin to take direct action to address poverty. The Foundation played a very direct role in community selection and implementation. The program was implemented by 11 Delivery Organizations including seven state university Extension Services: Iowa State University Extension, University of Idaho Extension, University of Minnesota Extension, Montana State University Extension, North Dakota State University Extension, South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension, and Washington State University Extension. Delivery Organizations included two Tribal Colleges: Sitting Bull College and Salish Kootenai College, and two nonprofits: Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and Rural Development Initiatives. Also involved was the Pew Partnership for Civic Change and its LeadershipPlenty® curriculum.

Horizons One taught the partners that a program like this, involving relatively modest expenditures on the part of the Foundation, could contribute to significant changes in community leadership, community structures, and on knowledge of and action to address poverty. As a Foundation report suggested, “progress [in communities] was visible and significant.” The findings and lessons from Horizons One provided a sufficient basis for ramping up the program significantly in Horizons Two.

Lessons Learned

• Leadership, framed as the collective, matters and communities need to pay attention to it
• People will work on poverty if they see it, understand it and have help to address it
• Leadership capacity was enhanced
• Communities struggled with poverty
• Stronger focus on poverty was required
• Modest investments yield large returns
• Change doesn’t happen overnight
• Evaluation matters

Outcomes - Leadership

Leadership Matters. The emphasis in Horizons One was on leadership development. The focus was on building a new conception of community leadership, emphasizing collective and inclusive leadership, and on helping communities to better understand their strengths and assets. The undergirding Theory of Change was that by enhancing leadership systems, communities would be able to take action to address poverty.

4 QED was not involved in evaluation of the Horizons pilot. These data are culled from various sources including surveys, Delivery Organization judgments, Northwest Area Foundation staff judgments and the document cited below.
6 Ibid.
Enhanced Leadership Capacity. Available evidence and informed professional judgment suggested that leadership capacity in communities was enhanced in several ways, most notably by a changed definition of leadership as a collective, rather than an individual, function. People who had never before thought of themselves as leaders, or been involved in their communities, became involved and began to play active roles in the community. Many of these were previously disenfranchised, newcomers to the community or young people looking for a meaningful role in community life. In addition, evidence supported these outcomes:

- New or strengthened leadership skills
- Broadened and deepened community leadership
- Changes in leadership processes or structures
- Structures and partnerships to sustain the work
- New resources to sustain the work

New Leadership Skills. Data suggested that participants were better able to plan, organize and run meetings and work with diverse neighbors. There was evidence of people utilizing these newfound skills in various ways in communities, including running for elective office. In many communities, established and elected leaders developed more inclusive decision-making structures and processes, including such simple things as translating meeting agendas and minutes into Spanish. Pre and post- LeadershipPlenty® data indicated significant growth on the 15 dimensions of leadership skills (see chart page 7) taught in the program.

Broadened and Deepened Community Leadership. An underlying value of the Horizons program has been inclusiveness – of all ages, races, incomes and experiences. The pilot program confirmed that, with persistence, coaching and support, communities can engage more and more diverse people in leadership. All (100%) of the participating communities reported in surveys that they had added more diversity to their community leadership base, involving youth, senior citizens, newcomers, Native Americans and Latinos and persons living in poverty. In addition to more diversity in those taking leadership in the communities, survey data indicated that slightly more than two-thirds of the Horizons communities had more people playing leadership roles, both in Horizons and in other aspects of community life. Many, indeed most, of these persons were new to leadership roles. Just 19% of LeadershipPlenty® participants said at the outset that they were persons “who make community decisions.”

Changes in Leadership Processes or Structures. The evidence suggested that about three fourths of the pilot communities had changed leadership processes or structures, including new structures and work groups for community action, enhanced communication processes and more inclusive decision-making.

New Resources. In a small number of communities, outside resources were obtained to help the community continue the focus on identifying, recruiting and preparing new leaders. This was a relatively small number (19% of communities), but judged to be significant in continuing the work of Horizons.

Structures and Partnerships to Sustain the Work. Twenty five percent (25%) of the Horizons communities put structures into place to sustain the work in poverty reduction, and ten obtained outside financial resources to help them do so. At least four communities were able to launch community foundations to allow them to receive grants and disperse funds to sustain the efforts on poverty.

Issues and Problems. In implementing the leadership training components, Delivery Organizations and the Foundation identified a number of problems, including recruiting and retaining low income persons and those living in poverty, issues with the language, rigor, scope and relative rigidity of the LeadershipPlenty® curriculum, with blending more experienced and new leaders, and finding the right approach and fit of this curriculum in Native communities.
Outcomes - Poverty

Tackling Tough Issues. Throughout the pilot, communities, Delivery Organizations and the Foundation struggled with finding ways to insure that poverty was the focus of newly minted leaders. Communities in the pilot had difficulty talking about and understanding how they could address poverty.

Communities Struggled with Poverty. In a series of reflections from community coaches and Delivery Organizations, it was said that communities really struggled with poverty because poverty is hard, or as one said, “It takes the air out of people.” In order to qualify for the program, communities had to reach a certain threshold of poverty, so communities clearly knew that they had poverty issues. However, people had difficulty understanding the causes and consequences of poverty in their communities, sometimes also grappling with entrenched negative attitudes toward people in poverty. Moreover, there was no framework to guide the discussions or to help communities identify ways they could take action on poverty. Delivery organizations, too, had some difficulty in approaching poverty, given that, for most, this was not a core competency or sustained focus.

The evaluators provided the following observations about community capacity to address poverty in Horizons One:

- Mixed success in engaging and sustaining the involvement of persons living in poverty
- New knowledge and awareness of community poverty
- Some commitment to take action
- Structures and partnerships to sustain the work

Mixed Success in Involving Persons in Poverty. While the leadership outcomes noted that communities had attempted to build low income people or those living in poverty into their leadership systems, in reality only about half of the communities reported they had been successful in so doing. However, all reported being intentional about attempting to recruit and engage this target group.

New Knowledge and Awareness of Poverty. While coaches and Delivery Organizations reported that the Horizons pilot communities had a greater awareness of poverty, survey data provided a more nuanced perspective. Only one third of participating communities were judged to have greater knowledge of poverty, and just 25% an increased commitment to do something about it. It was noted, however, that most participants in the program were more aware of what poverty is, and more empathetic for those in need.

Some Commitment to Take Action. In some communities, that newfound awareness of poverty also led to concrete actions in the form of such things as a community Circle of Support leading to increased family incomes, policy changes affecting utility charges, policy changes affecting affordable housing and other actions, such as youth development and economic development. People clearly began to see the linkage between their actions and the nature and extent of poverty in their communities. However, it was noted that communities made progress in “fits and starts” and that many of the actions taken by communities had a questionable linkage to poverty reduction.

Issues and problems. As noted, the topic of poverty was very hard for these small rural and reservation communities. Without a consistent framework to approach the subject, communities were not able to maintain a focus on poverty. On reservation communities where nearly everyone was in financial poverty, most did not see themselves as poor, poverty is defined very differently, and addressing issues of poverty much more culturally complex.
Overarching Findings

**Stronger Focus On Poverty Was Needed.** As a direct result of struggles to deal with and take action on poverty, the Foundation added a partnership with the Study Circles Resource Center (now Everyday Democracy), and created a series of community discussions focused on poverty and poverty reduction, Study Circles. Study Circles provided both a framework for discussion, and a study guide to help participants better understand poverty. It also included a process for Study Circles participants to develop an action plan. The lesson taught by the pilot was that a focus on leadership was a necessary but insufficient condition for community action on poverty. The first step was to focus the community on poverty, and then work to build leadership skills and leadership systems for that purpose.

**Modest Investments Yield Big Results: Community Capacity.** The Foundation concluded that its relatively modest investment ($100,000 per community) in Horizons yielded unexpectedly large results. In addition to the actions taken by communities, communities began working together, and their efforts were expanded by the work of Delivery Organizations. Capacity in Delivery Organizations to work in extremely small, and resource poor, communities on a topic that was not a core competency was judged to have been significantly expanded. Organizations learned a new way of delivery – intense coaching – that not only built community capacity, but expanded their repertoire of methods for community development. Some of the Delivery Organizations, notably the state Extension Services, began to focus much more explicitly both on community outreach and engagement, and on poverty reduction.

As an outgrowth of the structure that required communities to work in groups of three, communities learned that it was necessary to build partnerships, both within the community and also with other communities and external partners to extend the work. Communities that had sometimes been rivals began working together for the first time, and follow-up data suggests that about half continued those relationships. Sponsors and partners learned a similar lesson about the importance of partnerships. The Foundation built partnerships with national organizations to assist in the work of poverty, leadership development and civic engagement, and learned how to partner with and hold Delivery Organizations accountable for results. As the Foundation’s report suggested, “It’s these partnerships that are a hallmark of Horizons.”

**Change Comes Slowly.** All of the partners in this pilot project learned that change, particularly significant change, takes time. They learned how critical it was to have a person assigned in each community, a coach, to nurture change. Coaches and communities learned patience.

### Sustained Effects Horizons One

- In 80% more people are involved in community leadership
- 60% have new elected leaders
- Increased civic participation
- More partnerships within communities
- 60% have received grant support
- Continued discussion of poverty
- Continued action to address poverty in half the communities

The Horizons pilot communities were surveyed in 2009 to ascertain what, if any, of these outcomes and structural changes had persisted. Leadership changes, poverty awareness and action, and structural changes to support both clearly have been sustained in the Horizons One communities, five years after the formal conclusion of the program. Significant findings included:

---

Sustained Leadership Outcomes

- **Sustained Leadership Changes** - in 75% of the communities, people new to leadership roles continued to be involved in community leadership, and 85% of communities reported that they were now aware of continuous need to recruit, train and support new leaders. Indeed, half of the Horizons One communities have repeated LeadershipPlenty® or offered other leadership training. Moreover, in 80% of the communities more people are currently involved in making community decisions; a change from community decision-making before Horizons.

- **Increased Civic Engagement** – in 75% of the communities more people are attending community meetings; in 60% new community leaders have been elected to office; and in 55% of alumni communities more people have joined local boards and community organizations.

Persistent Structural Changes

- **Greater partnerships and community collaboration** – 80% of communities affirmed that organizations in the community now work in partnership as a direct outgrowth of Horizons. A majority of communities have implemented partnerships with regional or state nonprofit groups to help implement community plans, and 50% reported that they have developed ongoing partnerships with state and federal agencies. Slightly less than half of the Horizons One communities continued their regional collaborations.

- **Resources and structures to continue the work** – Over 60% of the Horizons One communities have received grant funds to support and sustain the work, and 65% have a nonprofit organization in place to allow them to receive grant support.

Continued Action On Poverty

- **Continuing to Implement Action Plans.** Half of the responding communities reported that they had developed, and were continuing to implement, a poverty reduction plan. (It should be noted that they were not required by the program to do so.) In 75% of the communities it was reported that there is enhanced understanding of the causes and the extent of local poverty, and in 60% discussion of and conversation about poverty continues. While not always in the context of a poverty plan, communities were focusing on jobs creation (75%), long-term efforts to support youth and youth development (70%), job skills training (50%), and support for business and entrepreneurship development.

These findings indicate that the Horizons One program resulted in sustained change in community leadership, community and civic participation, and led to structural changes that can enhance the communities’ ongoing work in addressing poverty. It is significant that, despite the reported lack of emphasis on poverty in Horizons One, over half of the Horizons communities are continuing work on an action plan to ameliorate poverty and build community.
Findings and Lessons Horizons Two

The successful experiences in, and lessons learned from, the pilot phase resulted in the Foundation’s decision to launch Horizons Two - a very significant expansion of the model. Horizons Two began in 2006 and formally concluded in June, 2008. A total of 163 high poverty communities, including 26 reservation communities, in seven states started the program; 140 communities finished, for a completion rate of 86%.

The 18-month program consisted of five major component, each provided to communities by one of eight Delivery Organizations – seven State University Extension Services and one Tribal College: Iowa State University Extension, University of Idaho Extension, University of Minnesota Extension, Montana State University Extension, North Dakota State University Extension, South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension, Washington State University Extension, and Sitting Bull College. As noted, the program also developed a new relationship with the Study Circles Resource Center to implement structured discussions about poverty – the Study Circles. The Pew Partnership for Civic Change continued to share its LeadershipPlenty® curriculum.

As was true in the pilot, Delivery Organizations played a pivotal role in Horizons Two, providing communities with coaching, training, resources and connections to University resources, as well as local, regional or statewide partnerships. In addition, Delivery Organizations were responsible for helping communities meet required performance thresholds.

Overarching Findings: Community Leadership to Engage Civic Issues and Address Poverty

Horizons Two was a highly valuable experience for communities, mobilizing very substantial numbers of people, engendering both new knowledge, and a deepened understanding, of poverty, new understanding of community leadership, and significantly boosting civic engagement. It also led to progress toward poverty reduction, leadership transformations and structural changes. Issues and challenges were apparent. Some communities continued to struggle with poverty. Community actions tended to focus less on long-term solutions, and more on short-term solutions and amelioration. Poverty is a very difficult topic and it may well take time for attitudes and actions to evolve. Overall, despite these challenges in addressing poverty, data clearly indicated that participating communities made sometimes significant strides in building community leadership to engage civic issues and address poverty.

A Successful, Systematic Model

Horizons is a relatively complex model, occurring in distinct segments, each accompanied by detailed expectations for participation and accomplishment. Nearly all of those involved in extended interviews with evaluators agreed that while Horizons was a long and sometimes difficult program, it was nonetheless tremendously valuable. Communities particularly valued that this was a tested,
systematic program implemented by Delivery Organizations with experience and a track record of serving rural communities. For the majority, Horizons was a change-inducing, eye-opening and transformational experience.

**Communities Are “Better Off”**

In a final round of interviews conducted in a large group of intensely studied (panel study) communities, participants were asked two questions: “Is your community better off because of Horizons?” and “Would you (community) do it again?” Overwhelmingly answers to both questions were “Yes.” A very significant proportion of panel study communities, 88%, indicated clearly that their communities were better off because of Horizons, and an equal proportion would do it again. Respondents told us the program:

- Brought residents together
- Engaged the community in working toward a common vision
- Identified and energized new leaders
- Identified community assets and skills
- Built leadership skills
- Created hope and optimism, replacing fear and pessimism

Responding to a survey, 70% of respondents from intensely studied communities reported they were more optimistic now about the future of their community than when Horizons began. A very substantial proportion of respondents, 81%, replied that the results thus far had been worth the investments of time and local resources, and 53% reported that resources had already been obtained for sustaining community activities.

**High levels of Engagement and Completion**

The Horizons program successfully engaged and sustained the engagement of a large number of communities and a very large number of participants. Horizons also largely succeeded in mobilizing participants that mirrored the demographics of the communities. A total of 55,144 community persons participated in one or more of the program segments. In addition to successfully engaging large numbers of people, the program was very successful in retaining communities. Just 23 communities (14%) either did not meet participation thresholds or elected not to complete the program. That is a completion rate of 86%; a considerable success given the length, complexity and accountability parameters of the program. The Foundation had initially anticipated that at least half of the participating communities would drop out.

**Outcomes - Leadership**

**New Leaders – New Leadership Skills and Skills.** Horizons Two achieved considerable success in identifying and empowering new leaders, enhancing the knowledge and skills of both emerging and existing community leaders, and in providing venues for participants to apply that knowledge and skill for community benefit.

LeadershipPlenty® survey data
d confirmed that new people were accepting community leadership. Just one third (36%) of the LeadershipPlenty® participants had previously attended a leadership program. Most (81%) did not see themselves as community leaders. Among the nearly 3000 LeadershipPlenty® participants completing pre-and post LeadershipPlenty® surveys, statistically significant growth was registered on each of 16 items about leadership skills and knowledge. Mean score gains ranging from .71 to 1.05 (on a 5-point scale) were recorded on 16 items pertaining to leadership skills and knowledge. These were highly significant gains, meaning in all cases that there is a greater than 99% probability that this gain was attributable to the program and not simply a chance occurrence. Particularly strong gains were registered on several items that closely

---

10 See Appendix Three for LeadershipPlenty® survey findings from Horizons Two and Horizons Three
parallel the over-arching goals of Horizons, including community problem-solving, community development, community action and change.

**Empowered Leaders.** Given the goals of Horizons, it is of significance that the process was successful in creating a sense of empowerment, particularly among emerging community leaders. Participants learned, clearly, that changing their community for the better requires the efforts of everyone, and that all people have assets and significant strengths – in short, everyone is a leader. They articulated in various ways their newfound sense that leadership is collective, rather than individual; about “We” not just about “Me.” This was an important underlying goal of Horizons, and was an important outcome.

**More Participation in Community Decision-Making.** As more people became engaged in community activities, communities also reported that community decision-making changed. Well over half, 55%, of the panel study communities reported changes in the way decisions get made, particularly in the numbers of residents who are consulted or involved in community decisions. Most said that decisions were not being made until many voices were heard.

**New Skills Put to Work for Community Benefit.** The acquisition of leadership skills was important, but equally or more important was the transferability of those skills for community benefit. LeadershipPlenty® participants and those observing them told evaluators that skills were put to use both at work and in the community, particularly in addressing conflict.

**Dramatically Increased Civic Engagement.** The Horizons process resulted in a significant increase in the level of community engagement – not just in Horizons-related activities, but in an array of issues, organizations and causes. Over and over again, persons in intensely studied communities spoke of increased attendance at school board, city council and town board meetings. Most said that this was a huge change; people had never before attended council or other meetings unless they had some kind of grievance. People joined service organizations and civic clubs. In general, there was more interest and more participation in civic affairs, including voluntary projects and social events. This level of community and civic engagement was arguably the strongest outcome of the Horizons leadership development process. In 63% of the panel study communities, civic engagement was reported to be increased, sometimes significantly, from November, 2007 to the June, 2008 concluding interviews.

**Participants Running for Elective Offices.** As communities learned more about leadership, some came to understand the deficits in current leadership and many Horizons participants have run for elective office. One or more people have run for elective office in 35% of panel study communities, in all seven states. Most said that these kind of municipal offices previously had to be filled by appointment because no one cared enough to stand for office.

**Outcomes - Community Capacity**

**Significant Community Improvement Activity.** An analysis of the community plans from the 140 Horizons communities indicated a considerable number and wide variety of community improvement activities underway. A total of 1,811 different action items were planned or launched in Horizons communities. Some were longer-term activities such as business and economic development; others were put in place very quickly such as a variety of community clean-ups or community social events. Every community embarked on more than one action item; the average was 12.9 per community. The five largest categories of planned activity were: economic and job development, community cleanup programs, youth programs, community celebrations, recreational activities, and a number of adult education offerings, including entrepreneurship education and job skills training.

A significant majority of communities, 63%, were working on business and job development and 62% on various youth programs or services. Close to half, 44%, of the Horizons community plans mentioned some focus on fund-raising to support ongoing community activities, and 42% of the community plans included clean-up or beautification efforts.
Structural Change. Horizons communities were also reasonably successful in creating structures, and partnerships that will allow the many activities to be sustained. This was a deliberate focus of the program and an expectation for Delivery Organizations; creating structures that would sustain the new leaders and provide sources of support for community enhancement and poverty reduction activities. Data indicated quite clearly that Delivery Organizations and communities have worked hard at either identifying an existing community nonprofit or civic entity to receive and to house funds, or to create a new 501(c) 3 or community foundation. Communities have also developed a potentially significant array of new, or in some cases renewed, partnerships among civic organizations. These partnerships have helped create local support for civic improvement projects, and may assist in sustaining activities.

Tools to Continue the Work. In addition to the formal structural changes, Horizons communities also asserted that they were provided with a unique set of tools to continue the work. Many communities have or are planning to use the LeadershipPlenty® curriculum again, and, as we have noted previously, communities hoped to use the Study Circles process again.

Grant Resources. Communities were able to leverage sometimes significant amounts of grant support to continue the work of Horizons.

Outcomes - Poverty

The Horizons Approach to Poverty. The pilot experience taught that communities had a difficult time focusing on poverty, so the decision was made to engage Everyday Democracy for community dialogues on poverty. The Study Circles discussion guide, *Thriving Communities*, provided an expansive definition of poverty, noting that “Poverty may look different to each of us.” The guide emphasized that there is no single definition of poverty on which all can agree. Among the various definitions of or causes of poverty included were: bad things like disaster or illness, poor education, low wages, racism, lack of jobs, bad public policy, economic inequality, lack of cultural ties and inadequate social support. The discussion guide also emphasized that there are as many solutions to community poverty as there are definitions, and described seven potential approaches to poverty reduction, chosen and defined as just a few of many possible action steps:

- Focus on early childhood, youth and schools
- Create more and better jobs
- Help people meet their urgent needs
- Join with others to create change
- Build and retain assets
- Fight racism
- Invest in basic community resources

These definitions and solutions were clearly apparent in the ways poverty was discussed in Horizons communities and in the kinds of activities undertaken. The community dialogues were clearly foundational in not only creating awareness of the causes of poverty, but also in designing potential solutions. Much of the newfound awareness of poverty had to do with the multiplicity of causes and consequences, many of which have little to do with financial poverty.

Changed Attitudes, New Knowledge and Understanding of Poverty. All of our findings indicated that the process of democratic dialogue experienced in the Study Circles was a very powerful experience. Many said this was the first time they had thought about, much less discussed, poverty. Many said that the exchange with those who had personal experiences of poverty was eye-opening. Responses indicated that the dialogue was in many ways pivotal in building acknowledgement of the existence of poverty, a new awareness of the complicated nature of community poverty, and a realization of the need to take action to address poverty.

---

Communities also saw this as a highly useful model for solving other, difficult, community problems. Importantly, communities were energized by this process, creating new actions and ideas to address poverty. Findings from Study Circles surveys indicated statistically significant self-reported gains in knowledge about poverty. On each of eight items reflecting knowledge of poverty, including strategies, community actions and policy options to reduce poverty, responses showed significant knowledge gains. In both surveys and interviews, participants reported that their knowledge of the causes of poverty was significantly enhanced.

Community Plans Did Not Clearly Address Poverty. In the content analysis of community visioning plans we noted their emphasis on such things as increasing volunteerism, community celebrations and gatherings, recreational opportunities and residential and civic beautification. Well over half of the communities undertook some kind of clean-up or beautification effort as an immediate outgrowth of the Study Circles action forum, and many communities found this to be a useful way to engage more people and to show tangible results. We also analyzed plans for any kind of “reasonable linkage to poverty reduction.” Utilizing an expanded definition of poverty solutions consistent with Study Circles, we rated the link as present if a community plan included any mention of youth services, education, recreation or mentoring or if it included mental health issues, cultural awareness activities, any focus on addressing basic needs, adult or community education, jobs and economic development, including entrepreneurship, healthcare, housing, and any other obvious links to poverty, excluding beautification efforts. Even with the most generous ratings, only slightly more than half (59%) of the community visioning plans were judged to have a deliberate focus on poverty reduction. We also observed that the word poverty was seldom used in community plans, and that any focus on poverty was seldom extensive.

Community Actions to Address Poverty Emphasized Amelioration. Community plans were also analyzed to determine the extent to which they incorporated activities to address basic needs, such as food, clothing and shelter. As the analysis indicated, 26.4% of communities were taking steps to address basic needs. In addition, 26% of communities also focused on housing issues, some short-term issues such as home maintenance and repair for low income persons, as well as longer term activities to support and create affordable housing stock. Additionally, plans indicated that 16% of communities had developed community resource directories, primarily aimed at helping low income people access services. Panel study interviews suggested that this was a significant underestimate of activities to ameliorate poverty. In 42% of panel study communities, people told us about food drives, clothing drives, used goods exchanges and other community-wide efforts to address basic needs.

Talk and Attitudes About Poverty in the Community Are Likely Developmental. In two ways we asked panel study participants in our final round of interviews in May -June, 2008 about the level, nature and extent of conversation about poverty in the community. One, we asked a question with follow-ups in our hour-long interviews, and two, included a question in the written survey. Responses were somewhat conflicting, perhaps predictably. Close to two-thirds of the survey respondents reported continuing discussion of poverty in the community. However, in interviews less than half of our respondents agreed. Our panel study indicated there was a great deal of community conversation about poverty during the Study Circles process, but that talk consistently declined. However, some communities told us that the awareness of poverty and the level of conversation was significantly increased. It is not surprising that in the communities where awareness has been high and talk has been continuous, more progress toward addressing poverty was made, in our judgment. Because progress in communities was incremental, we hypothesized that both talk and action on poverty are developmental; maturing and becoming more effective and more systematic over time.

Issues and Problems

A number of problems were identified in Horizons Two. Unsurprisingly the biggest issue was the nature and extent of poverty reduction work in communities. This was, clearly, a difficult challenge programmatically. This issue was raised by the evaluators repeatedly throughout the 18 month cycle, and there is evidence that Delivery Organizations worked with communities to insure greater participation of low income people and

12 See Appendix Two for Study Circles survey findings from Horizons Two and Horizons Three
greater emphasis on poverty reduction. Other issues included unclear articulation and lack of connection between the program segments which tended to derail action in communities.

The Special Case of Native Communities

Significantly, the program was implemented and viewed very differently in the participating sovereign Indian nations. On balance the program and its underlying values of self-determination and empowerment were viewed very positively on reservation communities, building, as one respondent put it, an “itty, bitty, tiny ray of hope.” However, data also clearly indicated that changes, both conceptual and programmatic, were needed to improve the fit of Horizons to Native culture and norms. The American Indian communities have extremely high rates of poverty and very limited infrastructure, so there should have been a recognition that Native American communities have fewer assets and support structures than even many small rural communities, and so needed more local support and more assistance than the program has provided to date.

Communities had difficulty with the ways in which poverty was identified and discussed, with concepts of leadership and the implementation of leadership training. Communities wanted to be able to implement the program in ways that are a more direct fit with local norms and values. Making these adjustments would not require wholesale change in the program but would, clearly, make it more effective. We recommended significant changes in the LeadershipPlenty® curriculum, as well as a number of administrative changes.

Challenges and Missed Opportunities

The following were included in the final Horizons Two report as challenges, missed opportunities and issues to address.

- Poverty remains a difficult, sometimes troubling and challenging issue, and it is clearly difficult to sustain the focus on poverty created in the community dialogue.
- While a majority of communities are implementing activities that can address poverty, most have trouble articulating a direct link to poverty reduction. Some community activities have a very tenuous connection to poverty reduction in the view of the evaluators.
- Most community activities are aimed at ameliorating poverty rather than creating longer term solutions to poverty such as education, job skills training, youth mentoring, etc.
- Because poverty is a very difficult topic in many communities, we believe that both attitudes and activities to address poverty may be developmental. That is, both attitudes and activities may take time to change and mature.
- We have concluded that both clear definitions of poverty and clear expectations for community activities to address poverty were lacking. We have also concluded that the Foundation, the Delivery Organizations and coaches need to maintain a consistent and relentless focus on poverty throughout. This was among several missed opportunities that Delivery Organizations have been counseled to address as the program begins Phase III.
- Other challenges going forward will include finding the right fit of the program with Native communities, tackling the difficult issue of race, and finding ways to blend an energized group of new leaders with established and elected leaders in communities.
Sustained Effects of Horizons

A major emphasis of the current Horizons evaluation was to learn what changes and poverty reduction strategies had been sustained in Horizons alumni communities. We generated data from paper and electronic surveys, as well as from electronic focus groups, from 132 Horizons One and Two communities or 79%, and from a total of 462 participants. Specific methods are described in detail in Appendix Four.

Over-Arching Findings

Alumni communities provided evidence of significant sustained leadership mobilization and development. Leadership changes have sometimes been profound. Communities have new leaders, a more diverse community leadership base, and increased civic engagement. Significantly people new to community leadership have run for and been elected to a variety of local offices. Communities have also engaged in significant community enhancement efforts, including long-term efforts at poverty reduction. There has been, and continues to be, talk about and attention to poverty and prosperity issues in communities; all sources of evidence indicated that was not the case before Horizons. We also learned that these changes and outcomes require continuing focus and attention from leaders in the community, as well as connections to continuing networking and support. Particularly communities would benefit from regional or statewide networking and sharing of tools and resources for economic development and asset and wealth creation.

- Community leadership has been significantly enhanced by Horizons, with new people in leadership roles, many in elective offices, and with more and more diverse community leaders.
- Civic engagement has increased as a result of Horizons, with greater participation in various facets of community life, including board service and volunteerism.
- In over one third of alumni communities, people new to leadership have stood for and been elected to a variety of local offices.
- A very wide variety of community enhancement activities, and poverty reduction strategies, persist in Horizons alumni communities
- Horizons alumni communities have an enhanced understanding and awareness of poverty
- Communities continue to discuss and attend to poverty/prosperity issues
- In slightly over half of the communities, the poverty reduction plan developed during Horizons is still being implemented.
- Communities suggested that, on the whole, it is far too soon, and far too unrealistic, to expect that those efforts will have achieved measurable or “hard” results.
- In a very significant majority of Horizons alumni communities, there is now a new nonprofit organization or a redesigned organization allowing the community to receive funds to implement community plans
and enhancement activities. This represents a significant increase in community capacity.

- Sixty percent (60%) of Horizons alumni communities have received grant funds in addition to the seed support provided by the Northwest Area foundation.
- Data provided by Delivery Organizations documents a total to date of $21,613,409 in grants to communities; a substantial return on the Foundation’s investment of $25,000,000.
- Sustaining the energy and the momentum engendered in Horizons is a good deal of work, and all evidence suggests that communities would welcome continuing support from Delivery Organizations and/or the Foundation.

**Sustained Leadership Outcomes**

- In 86% of communities, there are new people playing leadership roles
- In 87% of communities, the number of people in leadership has increased
- In 76% of communities, decision-making is more inclusive, involving more people in discussions and decision-making
- In well over half of the alumni communities (63%) community leadership is more diverse, including people from all demographic sectors
- Discussions of difficult issues, such as poverty, are more open and candid, and in 72% of communities there is continuing discussion of how to address and redress poverty
- Civic engagement has increased and in 34% of alumni communities, new persons have been elected to local offices, many of them Horizons participants
- Volunteerism and participation has increased in 60% of Horizons alumni communities

**Sustained Changes In Leadership In Horizons Alumni Communities (N= 132)**

![Bar chart showing sustained changes in leadership outcomes](chart.png)

- Civic engagement has increased: 26%
- New people have been elected to local offices: 34%
- Community leaders better able to handle conflict: 35%
- More people have joined boards, clubs, organizations: 39%
- Leadership base includes low income/persons in poverty: 40%
- Draw on more than “the same 10 people”: 60%
- Community leadership more diverse (all demographics): 63%
- Community decisions involve more people: 76%
- More open and candid discussion of difficult issues: 77%
- New people in community leadership: 86%
- Increased number of people in leadership roles: 87%

*Frequency = Number of communities where 60% or more of respondents answered Yes*
This is how focus group participants described this new leadership, expanded leadership base and an increasingly diverse leadership base.

**New leaders.** “And a lot of them are new faces and so they were looking for ways to get involved but just didn’t know how, or didn’t have an outlet to. And, then, a lot of the old group, the people that are typically the ones who do everything, every time, for every little thing. They have said that they are excited that there’s lots more people in the group. And that they’re not the ones that are always doing it.” (ID)

**Leadership base has expanded.** “I think if the program works the way that it’s supposed to work … what ends up coming out of it is that you have identified, within your community, additional leaders that are committed to moving your community forward, in some manner. There are more members than just your normal three or ten, or whatever it happens to be. So, my leadership base, my volunteer base, has actually expanded quite a bit. So, when I have things going on, I can actually call on different people now instead of calling on the same people all the time. And, to me, that is the success of this program.” (ND)

**Definitely seen new leadership.** “We have definitely seen new leadership. I mean different people….Another person, she’s a young new married person, new to the community and through Horizons, now, she’s gotten involved. She will tell you, ‘I didn’t have the confidence.’ She just didn’t feel part of the community. Well now they’re very much part of the community. She’s on the Pool Board…I mean we have stories like that…I think they’re significant.” (MT)

**Strengthened what we were doing:** “We had started a community club before Horizons. We had been dormant for so long. There were no civic organizations. We started the group. Then Horizons came on the scene. When we got involved in Horizons it really strengthened what we were doing. People who were not necessarily active in the community got involved in Study Circles. Now we can always go back to them and they will help.” (SD)

**Hispanic leadership.** “The neatest thing that I think took place in [name] was that we were able to develop a core group of the Hispanic culture … to become involved in our community. And to grow and develop and take different training programs and they really … how do I want to put it … they really worked well. We were able to attract a broad base of everything from high school students of the Hispanic culture to the grandmother that sat at home.”  (MN)

**We have managed to keep the people diverse.** “It’s been three years now and the change is very noticeable. And it’s just amazing. People want to help. And we don’t have a very large community. There’s about 1500 people in our town. There’s been a lot of cooperation and a lot of not giving up and getting across some of the personal issues and taking and utilizing what we learned about getting along and listening to different points of view. And I think one of the biggest things for us is that we have managed to keep the people diverse. There are poor people and there are wealthy people…there’s been a lot of good leadership coming out of this.” (IA)

**Sustained Increases in Civic Engagement.** Survey responses suggested that in 34% of communities, people who had not previously run or served have been elected to local offices, and in 39% of communities, more people have joined local Boards, clubs, service or other organizations. These findings are very consistent with what we reported for Horizons Two. We probed this in our focus groups where the answers generally supported an increase in civic engagement, particularly as it pertains to local board service and to Horizons participants running for office. Moreover, all of the communities participating in the focus groups (25) said that Horizons has made it easier to get people to volunteer and to contribute to community causes. However, most indicated that has not been true of engagement in city or township governance issues, or in broader structural change. In the focus groups, we heard reports of people elected to office in six (24%) of the focus group communities.

**Leadership Issues**

Still the leadership picture was not completely rosy. While, as noted, community leadership has become more diverse since Horizons, it has been difficult to attract and/or to sustain the engagement of low income persons. Just 40% of communities agreed that their community leadership base currently includes people who are low
income or living in poverty. While that may represent an increase, it still suggests that it is a difficult process to include those most affected by community decisions on how to address or redress poverty.

Communities lamented that it has been hard to sustain these leadership changes, and that it has proved very difficult to continue the necessary process of continually recruiting and supporting new leaders. Both focus group discussions and open-ended survey comments suggest that many communities have experienced a fall-off in participation, and some level of “burn-out.”

**Sustained Outcomes Related to Poverty**

- As a result of the discussions in Horizons, people understand the extent of local poverty in 82% of communities and the causes of poverty in 77% of communities
- More people in the community have been taking individual actions to ameliorate poverty
- In over half of the Horizons alumni communities (55%), the poverty reduction plan developed in the program is still being implemented
- Of those poverty reduction plans, 55% include long-term efforts to address poverty by focusing on youth; 51% include efforts to help people meet urgent needs for food, clothing and shelter; 42% include systemic efforts such as jobs creation, job skills training, ongoing business or economic development.
- 35% of the poverty reduction plans in communities include measurable goals for reducing poverty
- Communities believe that they have made some progress toward poverty reduction, but that more significant progress will take time

**Sustained Efforts to Address Poverty in Horizons Alumni Communities (N = 132)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More people taking individual actions to help people</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued to talk regularly about how to address poverty</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizons helped people understand extent of local poverty</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizons helped people causes of local poverty</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently implementing Horizons poverty plan</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan includes long-term efforts in education and youth</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan includes helping people meet urgent needs</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan includes systemic efforts such as jobs creation</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan has measurable goals for poverty reduction</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan includes efforts to change public policies</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Over Half Currently Implementing Horizons Plan.** As the preceding graph indicates, there have been, and are, continuing efforts in Horizons communities to discuss, address and take action on poverty. And, significantly, over half of the respondent communities are currently involved in implementing the poverty reduction plan developed during Horizons. Most respondents believe that the efforts to date have fallen
somewhat short of measurable progress, but do represent significant first steps. There is limited evidence of sustained systemic action to reduce poverty in Horizons alumni communities. There is, however, a very clear sense that most communities are, as one respondent put it, “walking down that path.” Nearly all communities agreed that it is still too soon to make judgments about the program’s effects on poverty.

Continuing Community Discussion About Poverty. Survey and other data indicated that a majority of Horizons alumni communities are continuing to talk about what can be done to address poverty in the community; something we suggested in the Horizons Two evaluation as one indicator of community commitment to address poverty. A plurality of Horizons alumni communities agreed that the discussions during Horizons helped people in the community understand the extent of poverty (82% of communities), and that the discussions helped people to understand the causes of local poverty (77% of communities). Focus group discussions often centered on the effects of this powerful new awareness.

Getting over the shock: “I think the biggest thing, in [name], is that people just aren’t aware. We weren’t aware that we have this much poverty. You don’t see it like you do in big cities. So to get that comprehended, first, that we have this level of poverty. Then it’s like, ‘well, how do we help it?’ We don’t see people sitting on the streets, we don’t see people starving. So, the first thing was getting over the shock that we have this level of poverty.” (SD)

It's starting to happen. “I think we can all show that within our community the biggest thing was that the people, within the community, did not even recognize what poverty was. When that first came out in the initial discussions there were blank looks around the table. ‘We don’t have poverty here.’ So, there had to be an educational process that went through an understanding that poverty is not just economics. And, once that process took place and the progressions took place, within the small groups, that has to overflow to the rest of the community before the changes take place. And, it is starting to happen.” (ND)

Continued Implementation of Poverty Reduction Plans and Activities. As survey data indicate, over half (55%) of the alumni communities agreed that “we are currently implementing the poverty reduction plan that we developed during the Horizons program.” The survey queried respondents about four categories of potential poverty reduction plans, based on our analysis of activities launched in Horizons Two, including: 1) long-term efforts to reduce poverty such as early childhood education, youth services, youth mentoring, etc., 2) efforts to help people meet urgent needs, 3) systemic efforts to reduce poverty such as creating new jobs, helping develop new business, providing job skills training, supporting microenterprise, etc., and 4) efforts to change public policies.

Youth Services/Activities. 55% of communities reported that the plan included long-term efforts to reduce poverty focused on children and youth, including early childhood education, youth services, youth mentoring, youth recreation and other programs.

Ameliorating Poverty. A majority of communities (51%) reported that their community efforts in poverty included helping people meet urgent needs such as food, clothing, home goods, shelter, etc. Open-ended comments suggested that there was considerable emphasis on these kinds of activities intended to address people’s immediate needs. Activities included development of or renewed support for local food banks, used clothing and household goods exchanges, backpack food programs for children and other similar efforts. Many communities have launched community gardens, and farmers markets, to assist individual families and often providing excess produce to local food banks. It should also be noted that in 63% of alumni communities, individuals were taking actions to ameliorate poverty above and beyond the community plan.

Systemic efforts such as jobs creation/business development. Just over 40% of the Horizons alumni communities are working toward some kind of systemic poverty reduction efforts such as jobs creation, job skills training efforts, micro-enterprise or other business development. As we learned in Horizons Two, some communities were discouraged from taking on these kinds of longer-term or economic development efforts. Hence, that over 40% are making some efforts in this regard is significant. Activities have included various education programs, such as English as a Second Language classes and computer classes to various efforts at small business or microenterprise development.
Other Efforts to Address Poverty. A very substantial number of activities have been launched and are continuing in Horizons alumni communities to address poverty and/or community prosperity. Many communities are providing resource directories or resource centers through which people can be matched with available services. A number of communities have focused on housing issues, mostly providing home fix-up and repair, but with some focus on the availability of affordable housing. Many communities, as previously reported, have focused their efforts on a wide variety of clean-up and community beautification activities. Many communities have started and are endowing community foundations which will ultimately allow a source of capital for ongoing poverty and community improvement efforts. In nearly every Horizons alumni community, as previously noted, there are continuing efforts to create or enhance awareness of the existence of local poverty.

Measurable Progress on Poverty Is Mixed

It should be emphasized that communities were neither required nor expected to set measurable goals for poverty reduction or, in fact, to have achieved measurable progress toward poverty reduction. Horizons alumni participating in focus groups were often critical of the questions we posed about progress on poverty reduction or the presumed expectation of significant change. In focus groups we heard two, competing, perspectives on whether their communities have made progress on poverty reduction. Some communities reported significant progress; others said they said they had made little, if any, progress. Most communities believe they are making slow, steady progress. The following are quotes from alumni community focus groups.

Positive Changes. At least one community, as reported in the focus groups, has actually seen a reduction in the poverty rate in the community, and is confident that their efforts have resulted in positive changes. Others reported that the current economic downturn has exacerbated poverty, making the community even more aware of poverty issues now than before.

Measurable reduction: But, through the LeadershipPlenty® Program … through this Entrepreneur Program … it's just the timing was perfect for us. Do we have poverty? Absolutely. But, it has dropped. We went from, I think we were at eighty-seven percent low to moderate income by the state's level. We're down to like seventy-two. Well, that's still huge, but we're talking fifteen percent increase in people dropping off that scale. That's not bad.” (WA)

Poverty has increased, but so has awareness. “Actually, I think in [name] poverty has increased … only because of the fact that one of our major employers basically shut down. Went from two hundred and fifty employees to under ten. Shipped all the jobs off to China. So, we've seen an increase in poverty. But, what Horizons has done is it's raised the awareness level in the entire community. That poverty exists … not only financial poverty, but as was stated earlier, the poverty of loneliness is across the board. It's students … it's middle aged people … it's the elderly.” (MN)

Little, if any, Progress. Some communities reported that they had made little progress on the poverty front.

Haven't accomplished a whole lot. “On a scale of 1-10 we’re at the lower end. I would say, on a scale of one to ten, we're probably floating around in the lower numbers. I think our thrust, currently, is going to improve that considerably. We have had some younger people running for Mayor … for City Council and I think that's going to help. But, right now, I would say that we really haven't accomplished a whole lot other than our thrust is into the Food Bank and we have helped them.” (WA)

Leadership, yes – poverty reduction no. “As far as getting people to work together … networking … improving and tightening leadership … all that has happened. And, so I think, that's the positive side of Horizons. Because I don't know that that would have happened without Horizons. But is it that piece of poverty reduction that I believe is a tangible measurable goal? I don't think that we have moved much off of dead center on that.” (IA)
Small Steps. However, other communities, indeed the majority, felt that they have and are continuing to make progress, albeit in small ways and in ways that are not easily measurable or observable.

**Progress, depending on definition.** “I would say that [name] has (made progress on poverty). But in the sense on how they're using poverty. Our definition, from the beginning, wasn't just to be how much money made if you are poverty, but the social aspects and all of the different areas. Whether or not you know your neighbor … whether or not you have a safe way to get to school. How to go about daily activities. What you know. Just all the different ways that poverty is an issue. And, essentially, if you use the definition of poverty, like in Wikipedia, that's what we used.” (ID)

Get caught up in improving community: “It [Horizons] certainly has brought out from the very beginning, that the real purpose of this is to reduce poverty. But I can agree with everyone else, I think we all get caught up in just trying to improve our communities. And, we do that in all sorts of ways. And I think there is something to be said for just when you work together and make new networks of people, which we have, then you're working for the betterment of the entire community. I think everyone raises up in that. And, I think we've seen that level of awareness increase as far as trying to help others.” (SD)

**Unclear Definitions and Expectations Affected Progress on Poverty**

Lack of Clarity Affects Sustained Efforts. Communities faulted the Horizons program for a lack of clarity in defining poverty, and in its actual or perceived expectations for results. Many said that the messages about poverty were mixed, at best. Some said that the structure of the program made it hard to focus on poverty in a sustained way, and that they are, in many ways, still trying to regain the focus. This was not a new finding; we have reported these concerns with consistency. However, what follows are direct quotes about the way this lack of clarity continues to affect sustained efforts toward poverty reduction.

Mixed messages from the Horizons program. “The part that was frustrating for us was in the Study Circle section when they told us poverty is more than just not having money. But, once Study Circles was over, that's all poverty was, not having money. And it seemed like the other issues, that people are poor spiritually and that type of thing, that was not to be our concern. But those were the things that were more of a concern locally. Even if it wasn't important to the Northwest Area Foundation. It was important to us. So, anyway sometimes that was frustrating, the mixed message.” (IA)

Poverty got lost. “Yeah, we had wonderful ideas after the Study Circles. Because that was truly where we started with the whole project, to decide what poverty meant to everybody and where we were going to go and how we were going to fix it. But, you know, that ended up being lost, to a certain extent, because by the time that we got to LeadershipPlenty® it was a whole different aspect of it, because, now, you're trying to teach them how to be leaders and how to run the meetings. And so the poverty thing ended up kind of just going by the wayside.” (ID)

The process gave local communities ownership of a vision that might not be about poverty. “And part of it, I think, is part of the process. So, we engaged in Study Circles, which is basically a strategic planning process where you're asking the community to identify what is important. And, you have to allow the community a certain amount of ownership to be able to pick the outcomes that they want to work on. And, because this is a part of the Horizons Program, on top of that, there was this additional requirement that it be about poverty. I mean you almost lose control over that a little bit because it's community process. We're empowering the community to pick the things that they would think are important, and that might only result in soft outcomes. But you can't undo that. You can't say 'well, you can't pick that because that doesn't really change things.’ So, we kind of had this added requirement on there. I guess after we had done our education and awareness about poverty we had done our job, in that respect. But, from that point on, I mean 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 when it came to poverty.” (MT)

**What Can Be Expected of Small, Under-Resourced Communities.** Still other communities wondered what should reasonably be expected of small, under-resourced rural communities, with limited external resources and, importantly, limited time to make progress. We find these comments reasonable.
Beyond our resources. “Some of the programs that we did, it's to help people maybe through critical times. We had a fund. If they couldn't pay their utilities or something like that we could help step in. But, to come up with a program that really makes the lasting impact on their employment or something like that. I think that sometimes is beyond what we can do with our limited resources.” (SD)

What do they expect? “And, the person that said, you know, ‘what do they expect.’ I guess that was my thought also. I wonder what it is that they wanted. Poverty is kind of a pride issue, too. I mean people don't want to say, ‘yep, I'm poor. I'm living in these dire straits, and, yes, it has helped me.’ I mean there's kind of a subtle undercurrent there. You know, you just don't go out and say ‘well, we brought in this program and now these people have, we've raised their income.’ I mean is that what it is? Are we supposed to, do they want something that raises their income so that there isn't poverty anymore?” (SD)

Takes a long time to change the culture: “When you're dealing with changing the culture in communities that have been homogenous, it takes a lot longer than eighteen months to show the benefits. I really do appreciate the program. I appreciate the support that they have given. I appreciate the continued support that they're providing for the alumni communities with paying for the mileage for different workshops and things like that. But, the reality of it is, if they were going to do this again, the strongest recommendation that I could make for them is if they can make a commitment to a community for a minimum of five years. Because that's about how long it takes to change the culture.” (ND)

Takes time. “I would say the leadership has to come first and the poverty reduction will follow. And, it doesn't happen overnight. It's something that is going to take, you know, several years."(WA)

It's hard to measure and it takes time. “It's really hard to prove other than just say, 'we've done some things.' It doesn't happen overnight and I think it just takes some faith. I know that in our community, and probably the other ones, when they come in here and sponsor this program, when dedicated people work at it. The key people in town. And, they just keep working at it. And, you might not see it, but it does turn the light on in a few people. And those few people were able to help turn the light on somewhere else. And, with the community foundation and the nonprofit going and a group that plan to continue the beautification project and hoping that those will bring these different kinds of organizations together and make more fun community things. That will work. But, it will take time and it's hard to measure.” (MT)

**Sustained Outcomes in Community Capacity**

- In 90% of Horizons communities there is now an organization empowered to receive grant funds and to manage and support the ongoing community work.
- In 75% of communities there are more partnerships among local organizations
- 71% of communities have forged continuing partnerships with Delivery Organizations
- Grant funds, in addition to those provided by the Northwest Area Foundation, have been received by 60% of communities to aid in implementing their community plans
- Significantly, grant support generated for purposes related to Horizons or because of the capacity built during Horizons has been large. A total of $21,613,409 in grants has been documented.
- Nearly half (46%) of Horizons alumni communities have developed new partnerships with state or regional nonprofit groups to help implement or support the community poverty reduction plan
- In nearly three fourths of communities, participants believed that they have developed concrete plans to build on their assets and strengths as identified and explored during Horizons

**New Organizational Structures.** A very high proportion of Horizons alumni communities (86%) have an organization in the community to implement, support and receive funds to implement the community plan. (In Horizons Two we learned that slightly under half (44%) of those organizations were newly created 501(c) 3s and about 60% were existing organizations.) In addition to these umbrella community organizations, a number of communities have launched their own community foundations; a significant outcome.
**Significant Leveraged Resources.** Sixty percent (60%) of alumni communities reported receiving grant funds in addition to those provided by the Northwest Area Foundation. We have been able to document a total of $21,613,409 in additional support to Horizons alumni communities. This money has come from a variety of sources, largely Foundation or public grants, and in some cases from local sources contributing to community foundations. This is likely an underestimate, as neither communities nor Delivery Organizations have been required to document grant support. It is, in any case, a significant return on the Foundation’s investment in Horizons communities.

**Enhanced Community Partnerships.** Follow-up survey data clearly confirmed previous findings that Horizons led to strengthened partnerships among local community organizations. These data indicated that these local partnerships have been sustained. Among Horizons alumni communities, 77% agreed that there are now more partnerships, and there is better coordination among local community organizations.

**Ongoing or New Partnerships with Delivery Organizations.** In addition to the local partnerships, 70% of the alumni communities reported that they had sustained connections with their state university, University Extension Service or tribal college field staff, faculty, or departments. While we did not directly pursue this line of questioning in focus groups, communities sometimes described the importance of the support, training and technical assistance provided by their Delivery Organization. Communities also suggested that they would welcome continued, even deeper, relationships with Delivery Organizations.

**Other Partnerships.** As partnerships among communities, regions and sectors are a hoped-for outcome of Horizons, we asked communities about other partnerships. Slightly less than half (46%) reported newfound partnerships with state or regional nonprofit groups to help implement the community plan developed during Horizons. To a lesser extent, 41% indicated that they have developed partnerships with state or federal agencies for the same purposes.

**Outcomes in Asset and Wealth Creation**

- In 54% of communities there are long-term efforts to provide youth mentoring to assist students in staying in school and enhancing achievement and aspiration
- Nearly half (46%) of communities are incorporating literacy or education programs, such as ESL or GED, into their ongoing poverty reduction efforts
- About one third of the alumni communities provide job skills training, including soft skills, to adults or youth
- Other efforts to increase family assets include: entrepreneurship training (23% of communities), assistance with home ownership (20%), financial literacy training (18%), low interest loans for microenterprise or business development (14%)
- Few communities are aware of or involved in efforts to help families launch Individual Development Accounts (although such efforts are currently underway in at least two states), or to assist families in increasing income by filing for the Earned Income tax credit

**The Special Case of RuFES (Rural Family Economic Success)**

In response to continuing concerns about the lack of focus on economic poverty and/or increasing family assets, the Northwest Area Foundation in 2009 partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to jointly fund and implement the Casey Foundation’s Rural Family Economic Success (RuFES) model in Horizons alumni communities in two states: Iowa and Washington. The RuFES program is a strategy for families to achieve economic success by helping families increase their income (“Earn it”), stabilize their finances (“Keep it”), and acquire assets and build wealth (“Grow it”). It is intended to empower rural leaders who can and will put good ideas and effective strategies to work, leading to more economically successful rural families.
RuFES is about: “helping striving families become thriving families who are getting by and getting ahead, contributing to and buoyed by thriving communities.”14 The RuFES framework consists of 28-family-focused goals. “Earn it” goals are intended to increase family income by addressing three areas: readiness to earn, opportunities to earn and supports to help close the gap between income and expenses. “Keep It” goals help families avoid “money traps” by increasing financial literacy, decreasing fixed costs such as child care and transportation and helping families find fair financial services and credit. “Grow It” strategies parlay hard work and prudent financial management into accumulating savings, home ownership and small business development. In intensive three-day institutes, with a good deal of follow-up training and support provided by Delivery Organizations, communities were introduced to specific models and tools they could implement quickly and over a longer-time frame.

**A Successful Experiment.** The RuFES experience in the twenty-one (21) participating Horizons alumni communities was largely successful. The program re-energized Horizons communities, giving them new energy, new focus, new partners and new tools for poverty reduction and asset creation. While each of the communities had experienced significant success in Horizons, most had not focused directly on asset building and family wealth creation. The RuFES training provided the community teams with an array of practical, relatively easy to implement, poverty reduction strategies with which they had not previously been acquainted.

**Specific Tools to Address Economic Poverty.** RuFES very clearly provided the Horizons communities with a specific tools and strategies to address economic poverty, including both new and accelerated movement on EITC and child care tax credit capture, financial literacy training in schools and other community venues. In addition, communities are focusing on business planning and job skills training, entrepreneurship promotion, work and family transportation options, microenterprise development and health care access, all with clear public policy implications. This clearly added value to the ongoing work of Horizons.

The evaluation of the RuFES/Horizons collaboration was intended to test whether and how RuFES helped sustain the existing momentum created by Horizons, facilitated and expanded implementation of community plans, and created greater impact by utilizing asset strategies that are part of RuFES and in line with the Northwest Area Foundation’s strategic plan. For all three criteria, the pilot test yielded positive results. The model not only sustained, but also accelerated, the momentum of Horizons. The RuFES action steps have clearly built directly on and expanded the community plans. Finally, it is clear that the addition of the RuFES model and the follow-up development provided by the Delivery Organizations have created both actual and potential impact by using asset strategies of direct benefit to families and communities. In fact, some potentially far-reaching and innovative efforts are currently being launched in communities.

**Continue and Expand RuFES To Assist Communities In Asset and Wealth Creation.** Among several recommendations, the data clearly warranted a recommendation that the RuFES/Horizons partnership be continued and expanded, as possible, to other Horizons alumni communities. Particularly for those communities where focus on poverty has been difficult, providing this kind of model, training and concrete community examples propels communities to take more specific action to address and redress economic poverty and to focus on family asset and wealth creation. In our view, this is precisely what Horizons communities needed to move to the next level, and this partnership was a smart choice. It should be made available to more of the Horizons communities to further maximize the Foundation’s investments in Horizons.

---

14 Annie E. Casey Foundation. PowerPoint Presentation, April, 2009
Findings and Lessons Horizons Three

A total of 103 communities in seven states began Horizons Three in 2008; 99 communities completed the program for a completion rate of 96%, higher than the completion rate of 86% in Horizons Two.

The Horizons Three program was facilitated by seven Delivery Organizations: Iowa State University Extension, University of Idaho Extension, University of Minnesota Extension, Montana State University Extension, North Dakota State University Extension, South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension and Washington State University Extension. In addition, Everyday Democracy (formerly the Study Circles Resource Center) and the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, respectively, supported the Study Circles community dialogues, and the LeadershipPlenty® training program.

Communities ranged in size from 202 to 4111; very similar to both previous segments. The average poverty rate across all participating communities was 16.37%, and the median poverty rate was 14.0%. This was slightly lower than the poverty rates in Horizons Two in which the average and median poverty rates were, respectively, 17.3% and 14.8%. Less than 20% (18.47%) of Horizons Three communities had poverty rates in excess of 20%. This was a significant difference from Horizons Two in which nearly one third (29%) of communities had poverty rates in excess of 20%, and is accounted for by the higher number of extremely high poverty American Indian reservation communities participating in Horizons Two. Five reservation communities were part of Horizons Three. As has been historically true, the communities were largely white. American Indians comprised 11% of the population of the participating communities, and Latinos 5.6%

Although reduced in size, the program remained largely unchanged. In a small change, this phase was introduced to targeted, high poverty, communities through a variety of preview sessions, some involving regional meetings; others involving much smaller community meetings, all at the discretion of the Delivery Organization. Horizons Two was introduced to communities through formal Showcase sessions, each with a standardized curriculum. Also changed, arguably, was the extent of emphasis on poverty, and management and coaching to maintain a more explicit focus on clearly linking action steps from one segment to the next, and so sustaining actions, motivation and enthusiasm in communities. Additionally most Delivery Organizations offered communities additional training in grant writing, poverty reduction tools and strategies and other supports. All had been clear recommendations from evaluation.

Also changed in Horizons Three, was the introduction of somewhat greater flexibility in the interpretation of program participation targets and thresholds, which clearly impacted completion rates.

Lessons Learned Horizons Three

**Overarching Findings**
- High levels of engagement
- A worthwhile investment in communities
- A long-term commitment

**Outcomes Leadership**
- New leaders – new leadership
- Significant leadership skill gains
- Greater community participation
- Enhanced civic engagement
- Skills put to work for community benefit

**Outcomes Poverty**
- Enhanced awareness and community conversation
- Enhanced understanding
- Changed attitudes
- Significant gains in knowledge of poverty
- Early community action
- More consistency in plans
- Greater focus on asset and wealth development
- Clearer link to poverty reduction
- Measurable progress will take time

---

See also Morehouse and Kroll: RuFES: Results of a Pilot Test in Iowa and Washington, June, 2010
Overarching Findings

Continued High Levels of Engagement

A total of 33,743 persons participated in Horizons Three. In the Visioning segment alone, 20% of the population of the Horizons communities was involved in some way – in providing information for the community vision or in directly participating in meetings or listening sessions. As in previous program iterations, data indicated that a substantial proportion were persons new to leadership.

A Worthwhile Investment in Communities

When asked if the investments of time, skill, energy and the Foundation’s money were “worth it,” the answer from communities was overwhelmingly yes. This was very consistent with findings from the intensely studied Horizons Two communities in which we asked the question, “Is your community better off because of Horizons?” A very significant proportion of panel study communities, 88%, indicated clearly that they believed their communities were better because of Horizons. Respondents told us the program brought residents together, engaged the community in working toward a common vision, identified and energized new leaders, identified community assets and skills and created hope and optimism, replacing fear and pessimism. Findings from Horizons Three were very similar, as these quotes make plain.

I can't think of anything more worthwhile. “I can't think of anything that would be more worthwhile. It has been worth it, above, and, beyond, not just the hundred-thousand dollars, investment coming back. It's like that butterfly effect, you know, the little butterfly wings, have a huge impact on individual lives … young, and, old, and rich, and, poor. And, as a whole, it's been so very worth it…Yes, it was so very worth it. I can't think of, anything, more worthwhile. Really, seriously it was extremely worthwhile. (WA)

Everybody had one message. “Everybody had one message and they wanted to say, ‘Thank You for including us in the program.' And our community is definitely different because of it. For the better.” (ID)

Leaps and bounds. “I think that we're on a positive track, and, I think that this program is going to last long after Northwest Area Foundation's funding is over. I really, truly believe that. And, I think that we're hoping to partner with a lot of the different organizations here, and, work together with things. And, so our hope is to just kind of keep rolling with it, and, make baby steps. But, in all honesty, I feel like we've made leaps and bounds. I really do. I truly feel that way.” (MT)

You have changed our direction. “What it does, is it educates us first. It makes us recognize and identify what it is that we really want to do, instead of scattering off into fifty thousand different directions. So, that, in itself, is a magnificent thing. It gave us a group of people who probably would not have ever gotten together, and combined talents, and, started down a path. You have changed the direction we were going. And, we will continue to change.” (ID)

Somebody's done something. “We have lived here eight years, and, they've been talking about 'somebody's got to do something' for eight years. And, now, in eighteen months somebody has done something.” (MT)

A Long-Term Investment in Communities

When asked both about measurable impacts as well as messages about Horizons that the communities wanted to share, a recurring theme was the strongly perceived nature of Horizons as a long-term investment – in leadership, in community, in poverty reduction. Participants said that this is not a short-term program and judgments about its ultimate effectiveness must stand the test of time.

By its very nature Horizons is a long-term program with a long-term payoff. “I would say that it's too early to say [that it has been worth the investment]. I'm really hopeful that there will be, but, I can't say that you're seeing a big return yet. But, that's not what Horizons is about. But, it's basically about tools for leadership. And, in those terms, yes, we're seeing a return on that investment. But, not monetarily yet. I think if you call me, again, in ten years, I might be able to report that your investment paid off. But, this is a
long-term horizon. It's hard not to see things in the short-term, but Horizons, by its nature, is a long-term program. And, I believe it will pay off here. But, it's not something you can look at right now; and, say that it is.” (WA)

It takes more than 18 months. “It takes more than 18 months to do this. We’re just getting started. We’re just getting to critical mass.” (WA)

A three year process on the reservation. “Horizons is like people talk about it all the time. They’ve got the concept that it’s building the community, that it’s helping the community. But it just takes time for the whole concept. I mean I really think, on the reservations, it could be twice as long as what it is. I could see it being a three year process, easily.” (ND)

In the long run you will get your money's worth. “We are getting trained to be trained. Or, we are getting trained to train. So, eventually, it's going to be a hundred thousand dollars worth, because, like I said, we're putting on these classes. We're not stopping. It's just a matter of, you know, within the first year-and-a-half, have you got a hundred thousand dollars worth, your money's worth, out of the community. And, I'll say no on that. But, in the long run, yes, you will. I think it's way too soon.” (ID)

Five to ten years. “I think when we take a step back and take a little breather we’re going to look back and think of this as very positive. When we look back I think it's going to be very well worth it. As, for our community, we were somewhat mobilized. I definitely think we’re going to remember this and think of it as a positive outcome. Because, we’re going to work on these ideas for the next five to ten years. And, I think, a lot of those programs would not have been initiated if this program had not come through.” (SD)

Outcomes – Leadership

New Leaders – New Leadership. Among the 5188 Study Circles participants, less than half (41.9%) reported any previous leadership training, and only 12% described themselves as “a person who makes community decisions.” While a substantial majority of people had volunteered in the community, comparatively few had served on a committee, organization or group, lobbied elected officials, signed a petition or taken an active role in community change. This pattern was even more evident in the leadership training, in that only slightly over one third (34.6%) of the participants in LeadershipPlenty® (2907) had ever attended a previous leadership development program, a slightly smaller percentage than in Horizons Two. Thirty-six percent indicated that they were active in the community but not one of the community decision-makers, and 39% reported that they were “just an ordinary person in the community.” A small proportion, 14%, reported that they were decision-makers. These data clearly indicated that the majority of participants in this phase of the program had not had previous formal leadership training and generally not exercised previous leadership roles in their communities.

Statistically Significant Gains in Knowledge of Leadership. A total of 2042 paired pre- and post-LeadershipPlenty® surveys were analyzed for this evaluation. On each of the items, respondents evidenced statistically significant growth from “before” to “after.”16 Mean score gains ranging from 1.07 to 1.40 (on a 5-point scale) were recorded on each of 15 items about leadership skills and knowledge. These were highly significant gains, meaning in all cases, that there was a greater than 99% probability that this gain was a result of the program and not simply a chance occurrence. It should also be noted that while these gains are consistent with patterns seen in both Horizons One and Two, they were larger in this cycle.

Particularly strong knowledge gains were registered on several items that closely parallel the over-arching goals of Horizons. It should be noted that these were also items on which strong knowledge gains were evident in Horizon Two, but again, as noted, the gains were larger in this cycle. In our judgment, this is an indication of more mature and more effective program delivery. The chart below illustrates the differences in self-ratings of leadership skills in Horizons Two and Horizons Three.

---

16 Means were computed using only those who had completed a post- program survey, N = 2042. Participants responded using a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A paired sample t-test resulted in highly statistically significant differences (p = .000) between BEFORE and AFTER for every question.
Greater Community Participation and New Leadership. In interviews with Horizons Three communities, conducted close to the end of the program, communities amplified these responses, reporting significant community changes including empowerment of new leaders, particularly youth leaders, and enhanced civic engagement. These are very consistent with responses provided in Horizons Two, leading us to call these leadership changes both striking and consistent. Examples cited directly from interview transcripts are below.

New leaders who weren’t here before. “We identified and we helped people identify themselves as leaders, who would not ever have considered that role. And, so, while maybe that doesn’t yet directly affect poverty, anytime you identify a leader, I think the potential is always there. And, that group of people, I still see stepping forward in various areas, in our community. Which is, I think, so cool, because they weren’t before.” (IA)

We’re all in charge of our future. “It has brought people who have not traditionally been the movers and shakers of the community into the realization that they can make a difference. This community had pretty much handed its future over. And if nothing else this has picked away at that and put people more in mind that we’re all in charge of our future.” (SD)

Somebody is finally helping. “I think that thing that Horizons did was, I think it told everybody that anybody can be a leader. And, I think small towns need to be reminded that a lot. And, I think, when the people that are always leaders heard that, I think they’re relieved and threatened, at the same time. Really, overall, I think it was encouraging to everyone. The current leaders might be a little threatened by that. But, when they start seeing some of these little projects happen, they are relieved and they feel like thankfully someone is finally helping.” (ND)

Getting things done. “I would call that a success, if you’re getting people coming out that previously didn’t participate in the community, and, now they are. And, it's not just myself. It's throughout the community. And, I feel like, now, we do have a perception, in the community, that if you have something that you want to try to get done, or, a project that is a community related project, that people are starting to view Horizons as kind of a go to rural people that can get stuff done.” (ID)
Young people taking leadership for community revitalization. “In Study Circles one of the participating kids said that they needed to start a thrift store. I said that would be OK as long as the kids took all the leadership for it and did the work. Somehow, the kids went ahead and made contact with a group in another county that manages thrift stores. Today they are moving in to a 1000 square foot facility. Now there is this newly refurbished storefront, there is another business located nearby and a new beauty shop across the street. The kids did all the work in getting the store ready. And now this area is getting a bit renovated. In addition to the store and beauty shop there is a new Mexican restaurant. I don’t know if Horizons caused this but I do know there is revitalization.” (WA)

Enhanced Civic Engagement. Continuing a pattern evident from previous cycles, Horizons Three communities also provided evidence of sometimes dramatically increased civic engagement. There has been greater participation in “the whole process” of community, including new leaders running for elective offices and serving on local boards and organizations.

More people participating in the process of the community. “I think what it does is it has brought out people. And, so, there are more people at the City Council meetings. There’s just more people participating in the whole process of the community.” (ID)

Civic engagement. “We have a few people who are running for office that were involved in the program, that now are running for the Park Board, for City Council and stuff like that. And you can see it when you go to the meetings that people are much more willing to get involved. And stand up and say their piece.” (ND)

Winning a City Council seat. “I think bringing people out of the woodwork, so to speak, is an investment, in itself, because before Study Circles, and, before Leadership Plenty, we didn't have that. We had the same seven people sitting on the same boards, just on a different night. One of our participants, out of Study Circles, and, Leadership Plenty ran for City Council, and won.” (MT)

Taking over projects. “It helped us identify who those leaders were. Two of them, have taken over the Street Committee. Three of them have taken over the Farmer's Market. I think the leadership was there, but, they didn't know how to use it. And, I think it really helped, in that area. Because, thinking about who to go to now to do something, I would know where to go” (MT).

Using Acquired Leadership Skills for Community Benefit. It was also clear that participants have put their newly acquired leadership skills to work for community benefit. Survey data collected immediately following the Study Circles indicated that participants intended to use their skills to work more effectively with others in the community, to enhance their personal effectiveness and to involve more persons in community decision-making. Increasing participatory decision-making has been an implicit goal of Horizons. It is of interest that less than half of the respondents indicated intent to use newfound skills to either “bring attention to the issues of poverty,” or to “work on poverty reduction.” Again, this was consistent with responses from Horizons Two, and may be reflective of the relative lack of attention to poverty issues in LeadershipPlenty®.

Outcomes - Poverty

The survey also asked LeadershipPlenty® participants how, if at all, the skills and knowledge acquired in training were affecting poverty in the community. The results follow.
Enhanced Awareness of and Ongoing Conversation About Community Poverty. Just about two thirds (64.7%) the current cycle LeadershipPlenty® participants reported that more people were now aware of poverty in the community. In addition, a substantial majority (60.3%) reported that the community is discussing poverty and what to do about it. Our previous evaluation data indicated that community action on poverty appeared to be a developmental process, requiring awareness and knowledge of the causes, consequences and breadth of community poverty and ongoing conversation about poverty and how to grapple with it. Both of these, then, are important indicators of potential community action on poverty in Horizons communities. Slightly less than one quarter (23.1%), higher than in Horizons Two, reported that the community was taking very concrete steps to address poverty, and 29% indicated that more people are being assisted out of poverty, again higher than in Horizons Two. This, too, may be a preliminary indicator of community action, given that LeadershipPlenty® precedes the actual community planning and action phase. Delivery Organizations, based at least in part on evaluation findings, have been working to insure that each segment of the program included one or more “action steps” to maintain a continual focus on poverty, to sustain linkages among program segments and to maintain the sense of optimism and agency that comes out of the Study Circles.

Enhanced Understanding of Poverty. A total of 8613 people participated in the Study Circles process, including the concluding Action Forum. Previous evaluation data indicated that a majority of participants in Horizons believed Study Circles was the most valuable component of the program; these data from Horizons Three were no exception. By all measures, Study Circles participants’ post-segment responses to the process were overwhelmingly positive. 85% of post-survey respondents increased their knowledge about the various causes and consequences of poverty. Participants in the Study Circles process very clearly agreed that they gained new insights, a better understanding of their own attitudes toward and values around poverty, a significant sense of their community’s assets and an important sense of optimism about their ability to address poverty and make positive changes. The following are representative quotes from Horizons Three communities.

See poverty differently. “What the Study Circles portion of Horizons is designed to do, and I think did, is to have the community look at itself and help to define what poverty is within the community. And I think the Study Circles helped the community and the people that were in it see poverty from a little bit different light.” (IA)
Addressed the ignorance. “As far as addressing it, I think we've done a good job, of it. We've already had a number of good resources, in place. We have a Food Bank … we have like a secondhand place. It's free. People bring their things, and, people come and take what they need. I think we've managed to, maybe, bring poverty up into the forefront of peoples' minds. And, so, we've addressed some of the ignorance that poverty may, or may not, exist, in our community.” (MT)

Opened peoples' eyes. “I don't know if there's been a measurable progress. I know, if you could measure awareness, then you could say that, definitely, there's been progress. I think it opened a lot of peoples' eyes to that it actually does exist here. Just with the Homelessness thing. To know how many people, in our area are homeless, at any given time. But, that helps people. I mean I think people have blinders on … ‘we've not poor,’ even though we really are. So, if you could measure that, that people say, ‘yeah, we do have an issue here.’ Then, yeah, I would say that was measurable. There's nothing really tangible that you could grasp and count. Shows you … 'look, here's what we did that reduced poverty.’ There's nothing like that. But, the awareness is definitely there.” (MN)

Awareness. “I don't know that we have fixed poverty, but, I think people are more aware of it. And, I think we have some things that will help those with poverty.” (ND)

Changed Attitudes Toward Poverty. Participants consistently reported that they better understand their own attitudes and values around poverty. Importantly, too, in both Horizons Two and Horizons Three, participants developed a sense of optimism about their collective ability both to make a positive difference in the community and to work to reduce community poverty.

Statistically Significant Gains in Knowledge of Poverty. Among several intended outcomes of the Study Circles process is increased knowledge about poverty. Pre- and post-Study Circles survey responses indicated significant proportions of respondents who increased their knowledge of poverty. These knowledge gains were statistically significant for all eight items at a probability level of p. = 000. This means that increased knowledge of poverty was, in fact, an outcome of the Study Circles process. Particularly strong gains were registered on community actions to address poverty, a focus of the Study Circles discussions. Before data indicated that participants knew very little about strategies to address poverty, individual actions to address poverty or community efforts to address poverty; after data indicated that participants gained significant new knowledge of strategies and actions. Significantly, participants also learned about the possible causes of poverty and how poverty affects their communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increases in Knowledge of Poverty After Study Circles Horizons 2 and Horizons 3</th>
<th>(Based on Pre-and Post-Study Circles Survey Responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale = 4 A Great Deal to 1 Almost Nothing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible causes of poverty</td>
<td>Different kinds of poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizons 2 BEFORE</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizons 2 NOW/AFTER</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizons 3 BEFORE</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizons 3 NOW/AFTER</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In extensive interviews done during Horizons Two, Study Circles participants told us that they developed a newfound understanding that poverty has many causes, including racism and being cut off from one’s culture. Respondents told us that this was among many “eye-opening” aspects of the Study Circles discussions. This pattern was maintained, and slightly expanded, in Horizons Three, with Study Circles participants showing statistically significant changes in understanding of the causes of poverty. On several items, pre-Study Circles responses from Horizons Three suggested more limited initial awareness of the many causes of poverty than in Horizons Two, and higher gains. We believe this is reflective of greater programmatic emphasis on poverty.

**Broad Definitions of Poverty.** In interviews conducted at the conclusion of Horizons Three with participants in 26 of the 99 (26%) communities, participants talked, at length, about their newfound understanding of poverty and its many causes. Most commented that the Study Circles process and discussion guide, as well as their community coaches, encouraged them to think broadly about poverty, and to think equally broadly about what their communities could do to address it. These are just a few of many examples.

  **Our community got that.** “I think that understanding the different types of poverty…I think our community got that. I think they really got that. That there may be people who are not poor financially, but spiritually or emotionally. They got that. And they become more aware of those things.” (IA)

  **Directed to think broadly about poverty issues to address.** “We were always directed that there was all the different kinds of poverty … that it wasn't monetary poverty, because that's what I think you naturally think of. No, I think we were directed, and even given more of an open mindedness about what poverty issues we're supposed to be addressing. So open to almost anything you want to do.” (MT)

  **Communities have to define poverty for themselves.** “It's a situation where the Foundation in regards to definition of poverty and how to address it didn't give us a whole lot of guidance. My thought, however, is they can't because it all depends on what the community's perception of poverty is, and how they see they can turn around and address it. The whole purpose of Horizons is to help the community to look at itself, to identify what condition, parts or definition of poverty is, that exists within your community. The Northwest Area Foundation, as an outside entity looking in, can only do as much as the people, within the community, want to do and are able to do. So, okay, Northwest Area Foundation didn't and can't provide a whole lot of definition as to what is poverty. Because it all depends on the eyes and/or perception of the community that you're in.” (MT)

  **Not just about money.** “And, I think it's brought people to realize that when you talk about poverty, you're not just talking about money. I think that's a big thing. And, then people don't realize that you're thinking about healthcare, and, education. There's so many different kinds of poverty, that financial is not just the only one” (ND).

**Actions Taken to Address and Redress Poverty.** In Horizons Three, very likely reflecting a heightened emphasis on action in general, and specific actions to address poverty in particular, a significantly higher percentage of Study Circles participants reported that they had taken some kind of action to address poverty before the Study Circles process concluded. Over two-thirds of respondents reported that they had already done something to address poverty compared to less than one-third of respondents in Horizons Two. Actions included talking to family and friends about poverty, talking with someone who lives in poverty, and joining with others to create change.

**Early Community Action.** Immediately concluding the Study Circles process, communities had an Action Forum to explore and then to prioritize ideas about poverty reduction that surfaced in the discussions. A total of 3425 people participated in the Action Forums to identify both short and long-term community activities to address poverty. The tally of Action Forum plans indicated a total of 387 different kinds of activities generated. This was an average of nearly four different poverty-reduction or community enhancement activities per community. It was clear that many communities moved very quickly to implement community improvement or poverty reduction activities, either before the conclusion of the Study Circles or immediately following.
The complete analysis of Action Forum ideas showed a wide variety of planned action types. The largest single category was community communication, including a variety of ways to link people in the community to existing resources and services and to enhance communication among residents. Planned actions ranged from the various efforts to enhance community communication to youth services to clean-ups, farmer’s markets and community gardens, to park and recreation infrastructure to tourism promotion. In the Action Forum action ideas, there was logically somewhat more emphasis on shorter term activities, such as addressing urgent needs, streamlining community communications, and welcome to the community-type activities.

The “Top Ten” Action Forum Ideas included: 1) community communication, 2) youth services with an emphasis on after-school enrichment and mentoring programs, 3) food pantries, clothing drives and amelioration efforts aimed at basic needs, 4) business and jobs development, 5) creating or expanding community centers with some emphasis on providing centralized access to resources about services, 6) community clean-up, 7) community gardens/Farmer’s Markets; 8) adult and community education, 9) community gatherings, recreational opportunities and celebrations, and 10) welcome to community activities, incorporating information about ways to be engaged in the community and how to find services.

**Community Visioning – High Participation.** The final facilitated phase of Horizons is the community visioning process. In this process, Horizons participants put what they have experienced and learned into actions that, it is hoped, will lead to poverty reduction. Each community was obligated to have 15% of the entire community involved in the process; in practice, 20% of all of the residents of the participating 99 communities were involved in some way. A total of 20,860 persons participated. One Washington community reached 81% of residents; a South Dakota community reached 61%, and in Idaho, where the visioning process was largely through meetings and face to face interaction, one community reached 45% of residents. These were very significant levels of participation in a community visioning process.

**Long-term Plans for Poverty - More Consistency in Horizons Three.** In Horizons Two we judged that there was comparatively little correspondence between action ideas generated in the Study Circles Action Forum and the community visioning plans. In this program cycle there was more consistency, suggesting that Delivery Organizations and Coaches worked with communities to insure that action ideas generated during the first program segment were not lost. The graph below shows the top ten activity categories from the Horizon Three communities Visioning Plans.17

![Top Ten Community Activities Horizons Three Communities](image)

17 Differences in plans and in analysis make precise comparisons of Horizons Two and Three visioning plans difficult
Seven of the “Top Ten’ were also among the “Top Ten’ items in Action Forum action plans. As noted, Action Forum plans emphasized short-term activity. Emphasis in vision plans tended to be on more long-term activities, many designed to increase family assets and wealth such as business and jobs development and adult education. Content analysis indicated a total of 471 discrete action items planned; all included both near-term and long-term objectives. Some communities have created extremely ambitious plans with as many 15-20 discrete action items. The average per community was 4.6.

### Horizons Three Visioning Action Items (N = 471)

- Partnering for services - ways to address basic needs
- Pregnancy prevention
- Opera House
- Needs Assessment
- Public Safety (includes gang prevention)
- Weatherization/energy
- Native language instruction
- Youth business
- Tutoring/academics
- Youth Services
- Attract and retain young people
- Leadership Development
- Underage drinking/AODD prevention
- Infrastructure Issues (sidewalks, sewers)
- Emergency planning
- Recycling
- Community infrastructure (cell, banking etc) - includes health.
- Ambulance/EMT/Emergency Services
- Home repair and maintenance
- College preparation, college awareness
- Cultural awareness/activities
- Youth Centers
- Grocery stores/coop markets/cooperative business
- Commercial kitchen
- Youth education/ESL etc.
- Flooding awareness
- Recreation
- Job Skills training
- Natural resources development
- Tax preparation/EITC capture
- Downtown Revitalization
- Fund Raising
- Housing (includes senior housing)
- Walking/biking trails
- Local business promotion
- Newsletter
- Tourism Promotion
- Affordable housing
- Child Care
- Welcome to Community
- Community Communication, Internal
- Health
- Clothing & Goods
- Basic Needs
- Youth leadership
- Financial literacy
- Youth Mentoring
- Website
- Public transportation/rideshare/elderly
- Park/recreation infrastructure
- Increasing Volunteerism
- 501c3
- Community Gatherings/Recreation/Events
- Youth Recreation/After School Programs
- Community Centers/Gathering Places
- Entrepreneurship Education and Promotion
- Food pantries/Food Programs
- Resource Directory
- Community Gardens/Farmers Markets
- Community Clean Up and Beautification
- Adult & Community Education
- Business/Job Development

![Horizons Three Visioning Action Items Chart]

0.0% 1.0% 2.0% 3.0% 4.0% 5.0% 6.0% 7.0%
Communities are Working on Asset and Wealth Development. The Horizons program Theory of Change assumes that discussions of, learning about and new awareness of poverty, together with leadership development, will move communities to action on community poverty. It does not suggest that communities will alleviate poverty, nor has there been any expectation that communities would move individuals or families out of poverty. There has been generally limited focus on community economic development. And, there is very little evidence that Horizons communities were acquainted with asset and wealth development tools and strategies, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), that help move families out of poverty. Strategies and models for helping communities learn about and implement family asset and wealth creation tools were pilot tested in Horizons Three to address this lack of knowledge, and the results are reported in pages 32-33.

Despite a lack of direct emphasis, it is notable that a significant majority of Horizons Three communities are working on one or more of the Northwest Area Foundation’s new strategic goals for poverty reduction. Seventy seven (77%) communities are working on one or more projects in: jobs and economic development, adult and community education, entrepreneurship and/or microenterprise development, housing, transportation or other ways to create assets and build family wealth. The graph below indicates that twenty three percent of all of the planned activities related directly to these asset development strategies. Comparatively few planned activities are specifically focused on ongoing leadership or capacity development, although it is arguable that the entire Horizons effort is about community capacity building. In addition to these asset creation strategies, it should be noted that a significant number of communities are working on youth mentoring, tutoring, and after school programs, all of which are long-term asset development strategies. Public policy advocacy or development has clearly not been an emphasis.

![Proportion of Horizons Three Community Activities With Direct Relationship to Northwest Area Foundation Strategic Outcomes](image-url)
Plans Show a Clearer Link to Poverty Reduction Than in Horizons Two. During Horizons Two slightly more than half (59%) of the community plans, most of which had been returned for revision, had what the evaluators judged to be a clear link to poverty reduction. In the current program cycle, 68% of the plans were judged to have a clear link to poverty reduction. The link was judged as present if a community plan included any activity related to ameliorating basic needs, adult, youth or community education, jobs and economic development, including tourism, healthcare housing, transportation, services resource guides and any obvious links to poverty. Clean-ups, main street redevelopment, community events, etc. were not included. This indicated growth/change in the extent of communities’ emphasis on poverty.

Horizons Communities Believe Measurable Progress On Poverty Reduction Will Take Time. In interviews conducted this cycle, Horizons participants were very specifically asked if they believed and could document that their community had made measurable progress in addressing poverty (note the question did not ask about solving poverty). While several communities reported progress in jobs created and business development, most communities reported that they were in the process of implementing plans which they believed would lead to measurable progress. Others reported that they had done a good job in addressing poverty, broadly defined, even if they had yet to make progress on economic poverty. Overwhelmingly communities said addressing poverty in a tangible, measurable way is both difficult and long-term. These views are consistent with the evidence provided by alumni communities, still working on poverty reduction three-five years after the formal program concluded.

Measurable Results – Economic Impacts. Some communities have reported measurable results in jobs creation, and business development, as the following quotes, quoted verbatim from interview transcripts, indicate.

Results in numbers. “[Name] can show results in numbers. We have created 40 new jobs; most are minimum wage jobs or slightly above. We have more square footage occupied by businesses.” (WA)

Huge impacts on the reservation. “I'm just really happy we got a chance to prove that we can do things down here. I think we're making huge impacts. Huge. I don't know how I would measure them...Well, actually, there are businesses coming in. I can't say that we're the ones that brought them in. But, I do see a growth, in the community. They've opened up at the Entrepreneurial Center. There's a new Family Dollar Store coming in. There's been a set of storage units that has gone in. I mean I see the community growing. I can't say it's directly from Horizons, but I think it shows pride in the community. So, I can't say how many businesses we're going to get. But, right now, I see things happening.” (ND)

One community's approach to small business or microenterprise start-up. “We have organized a local lender, the Council of Governments, the SBDC person and a master's degree program. We have a bank of computers that were donated...We provide personalized assistance to people in developing new business plans. People get mentoring, they are asked to take free classes, they are hooked up with a source of loans through the local credit union, other assistance through the PUD, to put together and hopefully capitalize a business plan. I do the mentoring and counseling. What low income clients need is assistance with good ideas, a location and money. We insure that they take the kind of classes they need and the tuition is free.” (WA)

Creating income opportunities through a quilting cooperative. “And, what we're looking at, is doing a coop type deal. We felt that by developing this sewing group, we have a lot of older people that are just getting by on their income. This is going to give them a chance to increase their income. And, any time you put a dollar in circulation, it comes back to you three/four times. So, hopefully, by just creating more income through the sale of these handmade items we're going to circulate more dollars, in the area. And so by forming the Coop is basically, I guess, is we're putting them into business, on a small scale, and, making it a bigger business.” (SD)
Impacts in Helping People. Many Horizons Three communities reported that there has been considerable effort and some success in helping individuals meet urgent needs.

Impacts. “Yes I think we’ve made measurable progress. I do. The backpack program (serves 80 children each week) was huge in that. The clothing exchange is huge. And I think those directly address poverty.” (IA)

Coming together and learning about the needs. “We have a lot of people that are marginalized in our community. And, we're reaching out. We've had a group of people that have been, basically, homeless this winter, and have been just squatting. And, we have come together … Game Night we've invited them, and, that way they come, and have something warm to eat. And, none of this costs anything, so they know they can come in and have some popcorn and, hot chocolate. And, we sit down and play games together. And, there's no stigma, everybody is welcome. It's huge, and, it may not sound like a big deal, but, there's actually been two families that have been homeless, that have participated in Game Nights. Two women with three children, between the two of them. And, all teenage boys were living down there, too. And, they all come, and, you know … it's Game Night. And, our community came together, and, purchased a car for the woman, so that she can have access to get to her job, since then. She's gotten a job, and, now she has a car. And, so … and, this is all because we're coming together, and, learning about the needs.” (WA)

Impacts on Awareness and Understanding of Poverty. As was true in Horizons One and Two, Horizons Three communities asserted that they have made significant progress in making the community aware of the poverty in their midst.

Awareness. “I don’t know that we have fixed poverty, but, I think people are more aware of it. And, I think we have some things that will help those with poverty.” (ND)

Addressed the ignorance. “As far as addressing it, I think we've done a good job, of it. We've already had a number of good resources, in place. We have a Food Bank … we have like a secondhand place. It's free. People bring their things, and, people come and take what they need. I think we've managed to, maybe, bring poverty up into the forefront of peoples' minds. And, so, we've addressed some of the ignorance that poverty may, or may not, exist, in our community.” (MT)

Progress Addressing Poverty Broadly. Consistent with the broad definition of poverty and the consequent breadth of community improvement activity, a number of Horizons Three communities reported that they may not have addressed financial poverty, but they have focused on and accomplished much in tackling the multiple facets of poverty. A number of communities, as the quotes below suggests, were concerned that the Foundation and Delivery Organizations had shifted the focus to economic poverty after the fact, and worried that they might be penalized for pursuing poverty as they defined it.

We've done a good job addressing poverty broadly. “When you look at poverty, as a whole, it doesn't mean just financial poverty. It's not just financial, it's in every aspect. It's the emotional poverty … it's physical … it's financial. I mean there's a lot of different aspects to poverty. And, so, if you take out the dollar sign, out of poverty, I think we've done a tremendous job.” (SD)

Addressed it at many levels. “I mean we do have a plan. I think that we're meeting poverty on more levels than just financial. I mean I think with our newest … our eighty-five hundred dollar plan … I mean I think we addressed poverty on an emotional level … I think we addressed it on a physical level, and, I think we addressed it on a financial level. And, so, man, if they don't fund that, I don't know. I have to tell you what … I'll be knocking on someone's door. I'll be crabby.” (MT)
A Long-Term Effort. Virtually all the communities interviewed in Horizons Three (and in the alumni community follow-up study) were adamant that they are making slow but steady progress in what is clearly a long-term effort.

**Tiny baby steps.** “Well, I have learned a lot about poverty. And, certainly, trying to make it specific to our area. And, when I think about measurable progress, within our community, I would say like tiny baby steps.’ (WA)

**Trying to build a sustainable foundation.** “I mean we're trying to address it by giving the community these rules that they need. We're working towards the 501C3 which will give us an ability to raise funds, and, provide different types of possible future training courses. Because, I really think education is one of the key clearest things for our community. And, to give adults the opportunity to learn different skills … or, to even get a different outlook on life, than they previously had. And, I think that, right there, can help reduce it as much as anything. But, a lot of what we're doing, at this point, is trying to make it so that it's sustainable, and, long-lasting programs that's not just something that's going to dry up in a couple of years.” (ID)

**Every time you identify a poverty issue you’ve won.** “It made people aware of the need. And, it gave them ideas. It was brainstorming …what this is about. That is the key to the process … this whole process. Because once you've got that together, identifying needs and relatively easy ways to address them, it doesn't seem nearly so ominous, when you can break it down into something as simple as twice a year laying clothes out on a table and letting people come pick them up. And, every time you identify a poverty issue, in terms that can understand you've won. Because we approached it from so many different angles. And, they got it. And, so, it's a great program. I think the Northwest Area Foundation has hit the nail on the head.” (IA)

**Issues and Problems**

Analyses of the data on Horizons Three communities indicated continuing issues in defining and focusing on poverty, and we have recommended a substantial revision of the Study Circles Guide, as well as the development of new material and new training strategies aimed at focusing communities on models and tools for asset development and systemic solutions. Communities continued to struggle with the integration of new and established leaders, and with the long-term effort of maintaining and sustaining the momentum engendered in Horizons.

**Challenges and Missed Opportunities**

- Maintaining a clear, consistent and strategic focus on poverty has been difficult for communities, although progress has been made. There is evidence that additional tools, models and resources focused specifically on economic poverty, would materially assist communities.
- Unclear expectations and broad definitions of poverty, promulgated by program materials and by the Foundation and Delivery Organizations, have both caused concern to, and in some ways hampered, communities.
- Engaging and sustaining the involvement of low income persons in program activities and leadership roles continues to be challenging.
- Finding ways to support, assist and empower Native communities over a longer time frame will be challenging for Delivery Organizations. There is evidence that Native and reservation communities require more, rather than less, coaching and support over a longer period.
- Finding ways to sustain the work of communities when the Horizons program ends remains a commitment of Delivery Organizations, but one that will be difficult to deliver in the face of budgetary issues for Extension and most public institutions.
Horizons’ Impacts on Delivery Organizations

Interviews Conducted and Section Written by Becky Kroll

In order to gather information about the impact of the Horizons program on the Delivery Organizations, telephone interviews were conducted with key leaders at each of the participating institutions. Key leaders included: 1) the chief administrative officer of the extension unit at each institution, and 2) a person structurally above the extension dean or director, someone who was in a position to hear about the Horizons program from stakeholders beyond the University itself. We asked the Horizons principals and programs directors on each campus to help us identify those two persons, describing the latter as: the most highly placed university official who would be in a position to hear about the impact of Horizons outside of the academic institution. This might be a president, provost or chancellor, or a cabinet-level person with responsibilities for external relations. A complete description of methods and a list of those interviewed appears in Appendix Four. The findings from these key leaders interviews are below.

Interview findings and responses to can be grouped into thematic categories: 1) Changes in Extension role and work with communities; 2) Changes relevant to poverty; 3) Visibility of the program; 4) Continuing the work, and 5) Why Extension?

It should be emphasized that the Horizons program was neither designed nor intended to lead to institutional change in Delivery Organizations. However, it clearly has. The program model afforded Extension organizations a kind of new road map for work in communities, more community-based, more collaborative and more focused on community economic development. It has had a material effect on faculty roles, and on the visibility and reputation of Extension organizations. The larger University has also been affected by the program’s emphasis on poverty, now considered a legitimate area of scholarship and emphasis.

In many ways, Horizons has transformed Extension organizations, causing them to reconceptualize community outreach and engagement, to change faculty roles and rewards, and to institutionalize a different way of working. Clearly it has changed the institutional focus on poverty, which we initially described as not a core competency of Extension delivery systems. That acquired knowledge and competence has infused Extension and has begun to affect larger change in Land-Grant universities. This is the way one key University leader described the change in Delivery Organizations:

**Transforming a whole institution.** “You tried to transform communities and you ended up transforming a whole institution that will magnify and echo out the impact for decades to come. It's kind of, that old parable about give a person a fish and they'll eat well for a day; teach them to fish and they'll eat forever. You can do that at the community level, but the half life of that work, as community leaders come and go, is probably not decades. But, I would argue that if you have an institution that you transform and it had this as part of its core function you're always there to reinforce it and to continue to work.”
Changes in Extension Role and Work in Communities

Changes in Community Work. The Horizons program has had a major impact on the ways in which Extension works with communities. In some cases, it has been transformative. Participation in Horizons has changed how Extension works with communities. In virtually every Delivery Organization, those interviewed talked about how they had moved beyond the traditional expert delivery of information to selected audiences to learning how to work in partnership with the entirety of a community. This in particular has led them to include low income community members.

A whole new approach. “For the most part, the work we were doing was much more one-on-one. So, a person would walk into the County Extension Office … we would help them. Or, we would work with a small 4H group or we would work with a producer … a farmer … one-on-one. But, I think now it's a whole different concept. I mean, I think now we see that we can reach out and work with a whole community. And, through Horizons, we've learned a whole new methodology about how to go about doing that. And, I really think it's completely changed our approach.”

Greater depth. “I would say that because of Horizons it's been my experience that we have a greater depth in how Extension works with a community. Instead of just providing educational programs, we've become much more involved with the people in terms of their daily lives, the impact of poverty on their lives. It's become a more thorough educational effort as opposed to a traditional Extension program.”

Interview responses emphasized that the role and mission of extension divisions, and of land grant universities, has typically included outreach and community involvement, but the Horizons model provided a more effective, proven and focused way to do this. In some cases, this has led to changes in how the institutions both conceptualize and practice outreach.

Community-based. “It is, I think, above and beyond what we would normally be able to do as in our role as the Land Grant institution serving the communities. So, that ability to focus on particular community based and community identified issues is, I think, the real plus that the Horizons Program brings.”

Deeper understanding of community. “We work in communities, but I think, that we don't always have an opportunity to really understand how communities can really work. And, the Horizons Program, I think, has really contributed to our deeper understanding about how a community works. How a smaller community works, and, also, how a smaller community, with limited resources, can work. And, I think that those kinds of things can change programming that Extension does … the research that we do, and, also, some of the focus.”

Horizons promoted change. “And, one of the things that I've said is that one of Extension's greatest problems is that they have stayed way too traditional and they haven't changed enough when they should have changed. And, Horizons has really helped them see a way that they should be changing. And, an area that they should be much more highly engaged, and, that's, of course community development and the reduction of poverty.”

Changed Expectations of Faculty and Staff – New Reward Structures. Those interviewed were quite articulate in describing the ways in which Horizons involvement has changed their expectations of faculty and staff. This included changes in how the institutions both conceptualize and practice outreach.

Duty to community. “But, one thing that has happened, in Extension, over the years that we have been involved in Horizons is the involvement or the expected involvement of all faculty, in communities, in working with non-traditional audiences. That's almost become an expectation. In fact, as part of the annual evaluations one of the things that is part of that now is, 'What kind of impacts or what kind of work are you doing in the community?' When we first started doing that some of the most traditional faculty went, 'What communities? I worked with the grain producers here.' But it's not even questioned any more. Everybody understands that your duties go a lot further than just your traditional ag communities. Your duties go along with the community.”
Expectations for work in rural isolated communities. “We have now, I think, the recognition that this is an audience that we should be much more deliberate in doing our program planning. And, that we have an expectation now, an orientation to tell our new hires that reaching out, particularly to very rural, perhaps, more isolated communities and its communities, if we work with them in a meaningful way [make] communities of hope instead of communities of despair. And, that it really is expected as an audience to work with. And, I think, it's a much more deliberate, it's part of an orientation.”

Rethinking Outreach and Community Engagement. Overall, experience with the Horizons program has had an impact on a number of the Delivery Organizations, instigating rethinking and shaping new ways to conduct community engagement.

Rethink community engagement. “That is probably the area that Horizons has had the greatest impact. And that is that it's really helping us rethink community engagement and, really, just outreach, in general. But, clearly, on community engagement it's made a huge impact. And, I think, it's presenting a whole different model. And I think it's also helping us see the value of community engagement. And, I think, hands down, I think that is the area that Horizons is making the biggest impact, within the University right now.”

Finding out what communities need. “It isn’t just the Horizons Program that's pushing this institutional change towards a stronger emphasis on outreach and engagement and reward and acknowledgement of participation in outreach and engagement. But, Horizons has given that legs by providing opportunities for people to get out in communities and see what can really be done. And, to have the skills to work with the community rather than coming in and kind of telling what the community … ‘well, we’re here and we’re going to do this for you.’ But find out what the community's needs are and then see what we have that we can work with them to offer.”

There is also acknowledgement that lessons learned from Horizons have been carried over to enhanced and increased work with communities in other parts of the extension or university programs.

More connected. “So it has made Extension more connected to the communities where they are asking us, calling us about other things that they might need, beyond just these leadership and poverty reduction and some other things, you know, good things that the Horizons has provided to them.”

Engagement of campus-based faculty. “Horizons Program really helped speed up the whole process of moving towards a more engaged university. Horizons offered an excellent opportunity for Extension faculty to work with non-Extension campus based faculty and the students to community directed projects. And, I think this has resulted in a lot more excitement about community engagement by campus based faculty and administrators and getting administrative buy-in is really key. And, this has really helped move the outreach and engagement effort along, at a faster pace than it might have gone. I think it's helped us to involve more campus based faculty in a shorter period of time than we would have been able to without the Horizons Program.”

Change Relevant to Poverty

The emphasis on poverty in the Horizons program has created changes at all of the Delivery Organizations. Key leaders interviewed indicated that attention to poverty has been slower coming and harder to accomplish, but there is evidence that an emphasis on poverty has affected Extension, as well as other parts of Delivery Organizations. This emphasis on poverty has not only infused Extension, but has also changed how others perceive Extension as a possible resource in poverty reduction work.

The emphasis on poverty has also permeated other parts of the Delivery Organizations, leading to new attention and emphasis on poverty in broader forums. These have included specific policy and programmatic efforts which have grown from increased awareness of poverty and poverty reduction strategies.

Integrating Poverty into the Work of Extension and the Larger University. Participating Delivery Organizations have made a shift toward naming poverty and integrating poverty issues in their work, and their universities. Some interviewed acknowledge that, as in the Horizons communities, it has been more difficult
and happened more slowly, but the effects are increasingly visible and influence communities as well as Delivery Organizations.

**Talking about poverty.** “The Horizons Program has I think focused us on talking about poverty. I don't think that that has been a word that we have actually used a lot in our programs before Horizons. We've talked about serving underserved audiences. And, our underserved audiences definitely are people working in poverty or below the poverty line, just because they don't have the access to information and the resources that people that are not in poverty do.”

**Pulled the veil back.** “I think it's pulled the veil back. In any large university you're not going to pull the veil back for every faculty member. To go back to my foundational metaphor, the Horizons Foundation is poured and now we need to build those structures, in the community, to deal with the poverty issues and sustainability issues.”

**More work on reservations.** “There was a time, and I'm going to be very honest, Extension did very little on the reservations. But, we realize now that what really matters is where are your services most needed. Who are the people that can benefit most from Extension or other community outreach efforts? And, I think, we're clearly getting the picture that it's poverty stricken, low income type communities that really need us. And, we're getting there. There's more and more attention being paid to that all the time. And, I do think, we're doing a lot more on the reservation now than we were ten or fifteen years ago.”

Those interviewed indicate that the emphasis on poverty and poverty reduction has infused Extension, as well as changing how others perceive Extension as a possible resource in poverty reduction.

**Increased understanding of poverty.** “We have been working on increasing our efforts in the whole community development area. Especially in rural communities. And Horizons offered us the opportunity to build the capital of our Extension educators in the community development area, in leadership development, working with groups, group dynamics, how to work effectively with communities and develop community partnerships. And, of course, it also greatly increased the understanding of our Extension educators about poverty and poverty related issues. And, so now, we have a core of people who really get it.”

**Extension as a resource on poverty.** “I think if there's one entity, on our campus, where people really are seeing us as a resource on poverty, it's through Extension and I attribute a lot of that back to Horizons.”

**Lasting change around poverty.** “I think it has. Yet, poverty is one of those things that you might find not a lot of our folks connecting with because it's a term that doesn't get used a lot in our state. But, through this program it elevated the attention on the fact that it's there … it's real … it exists in our state. And, programs like what we were trying to undertake through Horizons is a way of hopefully making lasting change around poverty.”

Those interviewed also pointed to specific policy and programmatic efforts which have grown from increased awareness of poverty and poverty reduction strategies.

**Training communities to work in public policy.** “Well, one of the things that we have done, with Horizons, is train communities to work in public policy arenas related to poverty. We see that as very important. Much like those of us who are Administrators in the Land Grant System, every year we have a program, in Washington, that we call CARUT. It stands for Council of Ag Resource, Extension and Teaching and it's really a collection of citizens. Each state has two or three citizens who are recipients of the Land Grant effort and they really go lobby for us on Capitol Hill. We train them … the citizens that receive the benefits of the Land Grant are the ones that we discharge. And, these are usually pretty influential citizens. Well, using that same idea, we're training communities to work in public policy arenas to address the needs of their communities, in poverty related areas, with our State Legislature. And, that is something that has been new and underway, now, for a couple of years. The problem we have, even though we're making people more aware, that have the power to fund poverty programs, the state is in a deep recession and we're cutting budgets everywhere. But, the effort … the educational effort continues in getting people trained in this area.”

**Policy around IDAs.** “In our state we don't have Individual Development Accounts and we also have very few communities that have any kind of Community Foundation. We also are short in terms of micro-lending
... very, very small loan programs for start-up entrepreneurs. And, we've worked very hard to bring that to the attention of folks. So, it brought attention to places in policy where other states either have something that's more favorable and we don't. And, trying to bring that to peoples' attention.

Emphasizing EITC. “I think the Earned Income Tax Credit Program … the IRS Outreach and Community Action Outreach did a good job, but, I think, we just added an additional layer making sure more people understand and not nearly as much money is left behind from those that are eligible, but just not aware of filing for Earned Income Tax Credit. So, I think those kinds of things came forward.”

**Visibility and New Awareness for Extension**

**Greater Awareness of and Respect for the Work of Extension.** Participating in Horizons has generated high visibility and new/deepened partnerships through the states. Interviewed key leaders identified ways in which the Horizons program has influenced perceptions of Extension and Extension’s possible role and contributions. This has drawn attention and increased participation from other parts of their own institutions and from key partners in their states. Further, the presence of the Horizons program on their state radar has enhanced awareness of poverty issues.

At each Delivery Organization, key leaders could identify a variety of stakeholders and decision-makers in their institutions and within their states who are aware of the Horizons program and appear to have quite uniform high praise for it.

Key decision – makers. “The Horizons Program has been visible to key decision-makers at the local level, where you have County Commissioners, you have State Representatives, we had one of our members of Congress at Horizons events. Giving Horizons Certificates. Hearing people say, ‘this program has made a difference where I live.’ And, so, when you get the attention of decision-makers the University notices.”

The Governor. “You talk to our Governor and mention Horizons, he'll know what you're talking about. He's been to the Horizons celebration events where these communities come in and talk about their success stories. Our federal delegation, our two Senators, especially … Horizons would chime out with them, as well, because they're very aware of the need of rural communities. And, I know, personally, they follow the blog sites that the Horizons program has put in place that rural communities use to talk about their successes.”

Word is out. “When the Governor and the Department of Commerce and Legislature and foundations, etc., in the state, are talking to you, as well as Tribal Groups, I might add … the word is out there. “

Signature program. “It really is one of the signature programs … one of the key programs, that has come to be known by many across all segments of society, including the University Administration, the Legislators, community leaders and, certainly, the staff of the campus.”

Poverty is a critical issue. “They see this poverty issue … one of the missions of the University now has gotten more appreciation because Legislators have become more aware of the Horizons project and how it has helped the communities. So, that has gone around. We have the University faculty, Deans, Provost, and the President recognizing that poverty is an issue that's critical to the mission of the University that we need to focus on and put some effort in there.”

**Changed Perceptions of the Role of Extension.** Interviewed key 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.

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.’

Continuing Horizons Work

Although all of the participating Delivery Organizations are facing serious budget challenges, all would continue the work begun in Horizons. Leaders at each of the Delivery Organizations could identify lasting effects of their work in Horizons. At the same time that leaders indicated the work would continue, they acknowledged that current budget constraints and the loss of NWAF funding would limit the program in certain ways. These included work with a smaller number of communities, reduced staffing, less intensive coaching, slower rate of progress, and more fragmentation among program components. Nearly all of the key leaders indicated that the current economic climate has affected their programs and their partners, making it more challenging to fund continuation of the Horizons work.

Extension Delivery Versus Nonprofit Delivery of Horizons

We asked the key leaders a question: Some people think the funding for supporting community poverty reduction work should go to nonprofit organizations which may have a more robust commitment to or experience in poverty work. What are the advantages of working with Universities, particularly Extension arms of Universities?

Responses to this question were quite consistent across Delivery Organizations. Key leaders, including but not limited to academic officers of Extension, point to the longevity of Extension, their statewide network and presence, staff located in all parts of a state, existing infrastructure and ability to leverage resources, and neutral credibility as advantages for doing this community based work on poverty reduction. A number of those interviewed indicated praise and respect for the difficult work that nonprofits focused on poverty reduction carry out. They did not see this as an either/or proposition, and noted that they benefitted from partnerships with such organizations. At the same time, however, they noted advantages of having this work conducted through extension arms of universities.

Extension as an Established Presence in Communities. Virtually every institution emphasized their long established presence across counties in their states.

A hundred years of experience. “Well, I think in terms of legacy programs, not only have we been, for a long time, in these communities, we're not likely to go away. And, so, I don't think it's nearly as risky to invest in the Extension System of the land grant universities. I mean we've got a hundred years behind us and it's not likely to go away.”

Unique experiences in community work. “Well, I do think Extension does bring, to the table, sort of a unique set of attributes and characteristics, frankly, that, I think that maybe, in general, non-profits may not. I mean, certainly, not least of which is the long experience and length of time … the hundred and twenty years we've had, as a Land Grant institution, of working with communities, throughout the State. And, so, since our founding, well over a century ago, that's who we are and what we do.”
Of the community. “We're not a group that comes into a community. We are a group that is of a
community and a region. And, our staff are universally respected and appreciated for their skills and ability.
We didn’t have to introduce ourselves. We brought, certainly, the expertise and capability, but we also
brought a hundred years of intimately working with communities and individuals. And, having standing. I
would argue that's part of the reason this program has been successful.”

Another advantage to funding Extension divisions mentioned by nearly all interviewed was the existing
presence of staff throughout their states. This also brings established relationships, commitment and
involvement at the local level, and formally educated staff to carry out the Horizons activities.

No barriers to break down. “Extension has a statewide presence and it’s a known and respected entity.
So, you don't have to break down that barrier to start with. And, our educators also have good working
relationship with a number of state agencies, so they can bring their expertise to the communities, as well.”

Existing statewide network. “The network that we have across the state is already in place. It's a mature
network. It doesn't take a lot of building up from ground zero to make this happen. And, what the funding
provided is just the stimulus … the catalyst, if you will, to be very proactive about it. And to have it take
place in a very large way across the state.”

Faculty live in the community. “Extension faculty live in the community … they know the players …
they know the dynamics and the potential of the community. And, they're there after the eighteen month
Horizons Program is over. So, they can help sustain the effort through a variety of ways.”

Those interviewed pointed out that funding Extension to carry out the Horizons program provided access to
existing, significant infrastructure at the Delivery Organizations. Lower overhead costs, and extensive
experience with grant reporting and accounting, were examples of benefits cited by key leaders. Key leaders
also pointed out the ways that funding the Horizons program through Extension provided access to greater
resources; the direct funding for this work has leveraged significantly further resources through the Delivery
Organizations and their partnerships and associations.

Leveraged resources. “Part of it is because we have leveraged, so well, other partnership dollars. So, it has
County money and has competitive grants and gifts and has federal formula funds, base funds. So, we really
are kind of a full package.”

A small investment gets a whole University. “So, a small investment, by Horizons, has gotten a whole
university working across a whole state … in fifty communities … and bringing tens of thousands of hours
of work to those communities from both students and faculty. You put a tiny drop in and it expands. And
it's a hyper-expansion, in some ways, of the investment. Next year we'll probably do two hundred thousand
hours of community work in the state.”

Real impact. “And, then it kind of goes back to what I have loved about the Horizons Programs. When I
get on the Extension Home Page and take a minute to look at the latest success stories. I think we have
great media and marketing abilities to share these stories locally, and with the State and with the local
agencies, the State Legislature, County Board Supervisors, the USDA, other Federal Agencies. And, then,
those success stories are based on the great evaluations of the Foundation. I think it's helped us build so we
have real numbers … real impact that's been measured.”

Broader national network. “But, the other part that I think is relevant is that we are part of the broader
national network of Land Grant universities and Extension operations. And, so, there's a collective set of
resources that exist through the Association of Public Land Grant Universities, that Extension Directors are
all a part of. And, so, there's that collective set of resources that can be shared from a national level as well
that can be brought to the table by local Extension agents.”

Several, although not all, of the key leaders pointed out that Extension has a reputation for neutrality, or lack of
bias, that may make them more credible at the community level. In some places, advocacy groups are
perceived to have a political agenda that may make it more difficult to gain community participation and trust.
Conclusions and Lessons Learned

As the extensive preceding data has clearly indicated, the Theory of Change undergirding Horizons has been validated. Focusing small rural communities on poverty reduction, helping them to acknowledge and understand it, and enhancing their leadership systems by identifying and empowering new leaders, equipping them with new skills DOES lead to community action on poverty. Moreover, these data have validated the initial assessment of the Horizons pilot test: relatively modest investments in rural and reservation communities do lead to significant changes in community capacity.

It is important to remember that Horizons was not designed to reduce poverty, but instead to contribute to the Foundation’s mission of poverty reduction by identifying, preparing and equipping new leaders and helping them to “take community action on poverty.” Clearly, the evidence gathered from 283 communities over five years substantiates that leadership changes have been sometimes profound, and they have been sustained. And, clearly, communities are taking action to address poverty. Indeed, over half of the alumni communities are still working on their poverty plan – some of them for as long as five years. Most communities acknowledged that by the conclusion of the formal 18-month program, they are just getting started on addressing poverty.

The leadership changes in Horizons communities have been striking and consistent. The extent of civic engagement, particularly the number of communities with new elected leadership as a result of this process, has been a highly significant outcome of Horizons. And even as communities continue to struggle to sustain the momentum and to nurture new leaders, these changes have been persistent. When these communities were first interviewed by the evaluation team in 2007, we heard a profound sense of pessimism about the future. Horizons appears to have replaced that pessimism with a sense of agency to make change and a kind of collective optimism that rural and reservation communities can thrive, even in very difficult economic times. As was noted in a recent interview, people believe that, ‘Finally somebody has done something.”

Community capacity has also been enhanced by Horizons. The program emphasized the development of new nonprofit organizations both to manage the work and secure grant funds. That effort was clearly successful in that nearly all of the communities (90%) have a new organization empowered to receive grant funds. Delivery Organizations have worked extensively with community leaders to increase their fund-raising capacity so that the work can be sustained and advanced. That $21,613,409 has been raised to date is a very striking accomplishment for communities of this size. By any measure, this is a significant return on the Foundation’s investment.

Clearly there have also been changes with respect to poverty. The program clearly led to a new awareness –a first-time acknowledgement of community poverty - and to significant new knowledge about the causes and consequences of poverty. Community activity has been broad and sometimes unfocused, and it perhaps unintentionally was insufficiently focused on economic poverty. However, there is consistent evidence that communities can be supported – with tools and training – to focus on more systemic poverty issues. Horizons communities have continued to work at poverty reduction, as they see it and understand it.

This is a mature and stable intervention, successfully modified and adapted based on a willingness to learn from data. It has produced important leadership, community capacity outcomes and a significant amount of community activity, intended to address poverty. The outcomes and lessons described in the report are summarized in the table following.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching Findings</th>
<th>Horizons I</th>
<th>Horizons II</th>
<th>Horizons III</th>
<th>Sustained Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Lessons Learned/Overarching Findings | Significant Community Mobilization  
High Completion Rates | Leadership, framed as the collective, matters and communities need to pay attention to it  
Modest Foundation investments in rural and reservation communities yielded unexpectedly large returns  
Change doesn’t happen overnight  
Evaluation matters | A Successful, Systematic Model Well Implemented  
Communities are “Better Off”  
High Levels of Engagement and Completion | Continued High Levels of Engagement  
A Worthwhile Investment in Communities  
Long-Term Commitment | Sustained Leadership Outcomes  
Persistent Structural Changes  
Continued Action on Poverty  
$21,000,000 in Leveraged Grant Support |
| Leadership Lessons and Outcomes | Changes in Leadership – Identifying, training and supporting new leaders  
Enhanced Leadership Capacity-Building  
Leadership Skill Gains  
Sustained Leadership Changes Over Time | Enhanced Leadership Capacity  
New Leadership Skills  
Empowered Leaders  
More Participation in Community Decision-Making  
Dramatically Increased Civic Engagement  
Participants Running for Elective Office | New Leaders – New Leadership  
Significant Leadership Skill Gains  
Greater Community Participation  
Enhanced Civic Engagement  
Skills Applied for Community Benefit  
Increase the Sustainability of Horizons | New Leaders – New Leadership  
Statistically Significant Gains in Knowledge of Leadership  
Using Acquired Leadership Skills and Knowledge | In 86% of communities, there are new people in leadership  
In 87% of communities, the number of people in leadership has increased and in 63% is more diverse  
In 76% of communities, decision-making is more inclusive  
Civic engagement has increased and in 34% of alumni communities, new persons have been elected to local offices  
Volunteerism and participation has increased in 60% of alumni communities |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching Findings</th>
<th>Horizons I</th>
<th>Horizons II</th>
<th>Horizons III</th>
<th>Sustained Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poverty Lessons and Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Changed Attitudes, New Knowledge and Understanding of Poverty</td>
<td>People will work on a hard issue like poverty if they are given help in understanding it</td>
<td>Changed Attitudes and New Understanding</td>
<td>Enhanced Awareness of Poverty and More Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Progress on Poverty Has Been Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed Success in Involving Persons in Poverty</td>
<td>Significant Knowledge Gains</td>
<td>Significant Knowledge Gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty Focus Has Been Very Broad</td>
<td>New Knowledge and Awareness of Poverty</td>
<td>Community Plans Did Not Directly Address Poverty</td>
<td>Changed Attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increasing Emphasis on Poverty and Asset and Wealth Creation</td>
<td>Communities Showed Some Commitment to Take Action</td>
<td>Community Actions Emphasized Amelioration</td>
<td>Early Community Action on Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alumni Communities are Continuing to Implement Plans</td>
<td>Progress in “Fits and Starts”</td>
<td>Talk, Attitudes and Action are Developmental</td>
<td>Greater Focus on Asset and Wealth Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty is Challenging</td>
<td>Clearer Linkage of Plans to Poverty Reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Measurable Progress Will Take Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In over half of the Horizons alumni communities (55%), the poverty reduction plan developed in the program is still being implemented.

Poverty reduction plans in 55% of communities include long-term efforts to address poverty by focusing on youth; 51% include efforts to help people meet urgent needs; 42% include systemic efforts such as jobs creation, job skills training, ongoing business or economic development.

35% of the poverty reduction plans in communities include measurable goals for reducing poverty.

Communities believe that they have made some progress toward poverty reduction, but that more significant progress will take time.
## Overarching Findings

### Outcomes and Lessons Community Capacity
- Increased Civic Engagement
- New Leaders in Elective Office
- Getting Things Done
- Sustained Community Enhancement Activity
- Sustained Structural Changes

### Horizons Impacts on Delivery Organizations
- Horizons Provided a New Model for Work in Communities
- Horizons Produced Significant Effects on Extension and the Larger University

### Horizons I
- Modest Investments Yield Big Results: Community Capacity
- Structures and Partnerships to Sustain the Work
- Change Comes Slowly

### Horizons II
- Significant Community Enhancement Activity
- Structural Changes including 501 (c) 3 Organizations and New Partnerships
- Tools to Continue the Work
- Leveraged Grant Support

### Horizons III
- Continued High Levels of Engagement
- Greater Community Participation and New Leadership
- Enhanced Civic Engagement

### Sustained Effects
- In 90% of Horizons communities there is now an organization empowered to receive grant funds and to manage and support the ongoing community work.
- In 75% of communities there are more partnerships among local organizations
- 71% of communities have forged continuing partnerships with Delivery Organizations
- Grant funds, in addition to those provided by the Northwest Area Foundation, have been received by 60%
- Leveraged Grant Support to Date Totals $21,613,409
- Changed and Transformed Community Work
- Changed Expectations for and Roles of Faculty
- Poverty is now Integrated into the Work of Extension and the University
- Greater Respect and More Visibility for Extension
- Delivery Organizations Will Continue the Work