

Northwest Area Foundation Horizons Program Final Evaluation Report – Executive Summary

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This is a brief summary of findings from the final report on the Horizons program; a compilation of evaluation findings from the entire Horizons experience beginning in 2003 and concluding in 2010. It was intended to be a broad, readable and approachable summary of numerous and extensive written reports, briefings, and presentations made by the evaluators over the past four years.

About Horizons

Horizons is a community leadership program, designed and launched by the Northwest Area Foundation in partnership with two national organizations and delivered by a number of nonprofits, Tribal Colleges and State University Extension Services. It was 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 Horizons program. The pilot program, concluded in 2005, involved 44 communities; 140 communities completed Horizons Two in 2008. The current cycle, Horizons Three, concluded in April, 2010, with 99 communities completing the entire program sequence. 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.

Horizons Theory of Change

In a Theory of Change, evolving over time based on evaluation findings and lessons learned, the program was intended to test whether focusing rural communities on poverty through structured conversation, and building new leadership systems, would lead to community action on poverty. Extensive data has clearly validated this underlying Theory of Change. 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, and 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.

Overarching Findings

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. Most communities acknowledged that by the conclusion of the formal 18-month program, they are just getting started on addressing poverty.

Leadership Changes

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

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.

Action on Poverty

Clearly there have also been changes with respect to poverty. 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. 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. Alumni communities reported that they have continued community conversations about poverty, and half are continuing to implement the plan developed during Horizons. Horizons One communities have sustained these activities over five years; in the the case of the Horizons Two communities, the time frame is approximately three years.

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.

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.

	Overarching Findings	Horizons I	Horizons II	Horizons III	Sustained Effects
Lessons Learned/ Overarching Findings	<p>Significant Community Mobilization</p> <p>High Completion Rates</p>	<p>Leadership, framed as the collective, matters and communities need to pay attention to it</p> <p>Modest Foundation investments in rural and reservation communities yielded unexpectedly large returns</p> <p>Change doesn't happen overnight</p> <p>Evaluation matters</p>	<p>A Successful, Systematic Model Well Implemented</p> <p>Communities are "Better Off"</p> <p>High Levels of Engagement and Completion</p>	<p>Continued High Levels of Engagement</p> <p>A Worthwhile Investment in Communities</p> <p>Long-Term Commitment</p>	<p>Sustained Leadership Outcomes</p> <p>Persistent Structural Changes</p> <p>Continued Action on Poverty</p> <p>\$21,000,000 in Leveraged Grant Support</p>
Leadership Lessons and Outcomes	<p>Changes in Leadership – Identifying, training and supporting new leaders</p> <p>Enhanced Leadership Capacity-Building</p> <p>Leadership Skill Gains</p> <p>Sustained Leadership Changes Over Time</p>	<p>Enhanced Leadership Capacity</p> <p>New Leadership Skills</p> <p>Empowered Leaders</p> <p>More Participation in Community Decision-Making</p> <p>Dramatically Increased Civic Engagement</p> <p>Participants Running for Elective Office</p>	<p>New Leaders – New Leadership</p> <p>Significant Leadership Skill Gains</p> <p>Greater Community Participation</p> <p>Enhanced Civic Engagement</p> <p>Skills Applied for Community Benefit</p> <p>Increase the Sustainability of Horizons</p>	<p>New Leaders – New Leadership</p> <p>Statistically Significant Gains in Knowledge of Leadership</p> <p>Using Acquired Leadership Skills and Knowledge</p>	<p>In 86% of communities, there are new people in leadership</p> <p>In 87% of communities, the number of people in leadership has increased and in 63% is more diverse</p> <p>In 76% of communities, decision-making is more inclusive</p> <p>Civic engagement has increased and in 34% of alumni communities, new persons have been elected to local offices</p> <p>Volunteerism and participation has increased in 60% of alumni communities</p>

	Overarching Findings	Horizons I	Horizons II	Horizons III	Sustained Effects
Poverty Lessons and Outcomes	<p>Changed Attitudes, New Knowledge and Understanding of Poverty</p> <p>Progress on Poverty Has Been Mixed</p> <p>Poverty Focus Has Been Very Broad</p> <p>Increasing Emphasis on Poverty and Asset and Wealth Creation</p> <p>Alumni Communities are Continuing to Implement Plans</p>	<p>People will work on a hard issue like poverty if they are given help in understanding it</p> <p>Mixed Success in Involving Persons in Poverty</p> <p>New Knowledge and Awareness of Poverty</p> <p>Communities Showed Some Commitment to Take Action</p> <p>Progress in “Fits and Starts”</p>	<p>Changed Attitudes and New Understanding</p> <p>Significant Knowledge Gains</p> <p>Community Plans Did Not Directly Address Poverty</p> <p>Community Actions Emphasized Amelioration</p> <p>Talk, Attitudes and Action are Developmental</p> <p>Poverty is Challenging</p>	<p>Enhanced Awareness of Poverty and More Conversation</p> <p>Significant Knowledge Gains</p> <p>Changed Attitudes</p> <p>Early Community Action on Poverty</p> <p>Greater Focus on Asset and Wealth Development</p> <p>Clearer Linkage of Plans to Poverty Reduction</p> <p>Measurable Progress Will Take Time</p>	<p>People understand the extent of local poverty in 82% of communities and the causes of poverty in 77% of communities</p> <p>In over half of the Horizons alumni communities (55%), the poverty reduction plan developed in the program is still being implemented</p> <p>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.</p> <p>35% of the poverty reduction plans in communities include measurable goals for reducing poverty</p> <p>Communities believe that they have made some progress toward poverty reduction, but that more significant progress will take time</p>

	Overarching Findings	Horizons I	Horizons II	Horizons III	Sustained Effects
Outcomes and Lessons Community Capacity	<p>Increased Civic Engagement</p> <p>New Leaders in Elective Office</p> <p>Getting Things Done</p> <p>Sustained Community Enhancement Activity</p> <p>Sustained Structural Changes</p>	<p>Modest Investments Yield Big Results: Community Capacity</p> <p>Structures and Partnerships to Sustain the Work</p> <p>Change Comes Slowly</p>	<p>Significant Community Enhancement Activity</p> <p>Structural Changes including 501 (c) 3 Organizations and New Partnerships</p> <p>Tools to Continue the Work</p> <p>Leveraged Grant Support</p>	<p>Continued High Levels of Engagement</p> <p>Greater Community Participation and New Leadership</p> <p>Enhanced Civic Engagement</p>	<p>In 90% of Horizons communities there is now an organization empowered to receive grant funds and to manage and support the ongoing community work.</p> <p>In 75% of communities there are more partnerships among local organizations</p> <p>71% of communities have forged continuing partnerships with Delivery Organizations</p> <p>Grant funds, in addition to those provided by the Northwest Area Foundation, have been received by 60%</p> <p>Leveraged Gant Support to Date Totals \$21,613,409</p>
Horizons Impacts on Delivery Organizations	<p>Horizons Provided a New Model for Work in Communities</p> <p>Horizons Produced Significant Effects on Extension and the Larger University</p>				<p>Changed and Transformed Community Work</p> <p>Changed Expectations for and Roles of Faculty</p> <p>Poverty is now Integrated into the Work of Extension and the University</p> <p>Greater Respect and More Visibility for Extension</p> <p>Delivery Organizations Will Continue the Work</p>