

Horizons – 2008 Evaluation Facts

Program description: Horizons is an 18-month program of leadership education, community discussion, visioning and action for rural communities. In 2008 Horizons added 13 more communities, now reaching 34 Minnesota rural towns, and has engaged thousands of Minnesotans in a vision for the future of their communities. Horizons communities receive training, support and resources that strengthen community leadership and begin a discussion about poverty and the future of the community. Eligible communities have populations up to 5,000 and have poverty rates of 10% or more.

Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Aspirations (Human Capital)

Horizons 3 (Fall 2008 – Study Circles)

Knowledge items [scale of 1 = almost nothing to 4 = a great deal]	Study Circle Pre- survey mean (n=464)	Study Circle Post-survey mean (n=383)	Percent improvement of mean
Possible causes of poverty	2.6	3.3	27%
Different kinds of poverty	2.5	3.3	33%
Reasons it is difficult to get out of poverty	2.6	3.3	27%
How poverty affects my community	2.5	3.3	35%
Strategies to reduce poverty	2.1	3.1	45%
Individual actions to reduce poverty	2.1	3.1	43%
Community actions to reduce poverty	2.1	3.2	49%
Policies that would reduce poverty	2.0	2.9	44%

Postsurvey data (n=383)	Percent responding Yes
Study Circle participants who increased knowledge of poverty	86.2%
Study Circle participants who have already taken action	68.1%
Study Circle participants very likely in future to join in community actions to reduce poverty	52.0%
Study Circle participants very likely to speak up/support policy changes that would reduce poverty	47.5%
Study Circle participants very likely in future to take individual actions to reduce poverty	37.6%

Behavior Change

Horizons 2 (LeadershipPlenty – 2007)

	# of LeadershipPlenty Post surveys	More people are aware of poverty in the community	More people are stepping up to assist those in poverty	We are discussing poverty and what to do about it	We are working to create changes in public policy	More people are getting help to get out of poverty	We are taking very concrete steps to address poverty
Totals	244	66.0%	48.8%	71.3%	48.0%	31.1%	23.4%

Horizons 2: Summary of Evaluation Findings (across all states)

Community Outcomes and Successes

From: QED Final Report Highlights from the Ongoing External Evaluation

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- Horizons is a complicated, difficult program model, successfully implemented, and viewed as a positive, tested, systematic long-term process by communities.
- The Horizons experience has been a highly valuable one for communities. Most (87%) of Horizons panel study communities believe they are “better off” because of the program and most (90% of communities) would participate again.
- Horizons has mobilized very substantial numbers of people (55,144) from all demographic sectors to discuss poverty and create plans for the future.
- The community dialogue (Study Circles) was arguably the most valuable component of the program, engendering both new knowledge and a deepened understanding of poverty and its ramifications in communities.
- The Study Circles process has been, and will continue to be used, in Horizons communities for other difficult issues, and is widely perceived as a valuable model for community problem-solving.
- The program and its LeadershipPlenty® curriculum have produced a new understanding of community leadership and recognition that effective community leadership is shared leadership.
- Participants acquired specific new knowledge and new leadership skills and put those skills to work for community benefit.
- In each Horizons community new leaders have been identified and empowered.
- Well over half of our panel study communities assert that there is now more openness, more communication, and more opportunities for input in community decisions.
- Horizons has resulted in significant positive changes in the level of community and civic engagement.
- Considerable energy and activism has been engendered in Horizons communities, and communities are implementing a significant number of new activities for community enhancement and poverty reduction.

Challenges and Missed Opportunities

- Poverty remains a difficult, sometimes troubling and challenging issue, and it is clearly difficult for communities to sustain the focus on poverty.
- 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.
- To a great degree, 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 will take time to change and mature.
- We have concluded that clear definitions of poverty and precise expectations for community poverty reduction were not always provided. Our data make it clear that a clear, consistent and relentless focus on poverty is necessary for community success.
- 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 those established and elected leaders in communities.