

**Northwest Area Foundation Horizons Program: Community Leadership to Reduce Poverty
December 2007 Report from the Ongoing External Evaluation**

**LeadershipPlenty® Segment Final Report Executive Summary
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Introduction and Program Overview

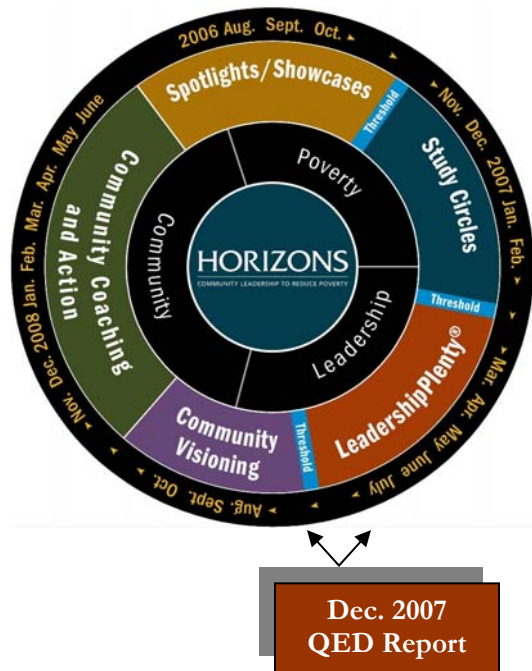
This report is a comprehensive assessment of the LeadershipPlenty® segment of Horizons prepared and written by the program’s external evaluators. LeadershipPlenty® is the leadership training and development component of Horizons, developed and offered to Horizons communities in partnership with the Pew Partnership for Civic Change.

Horizons is a community leadership program, funded by the Northwest Area Foundation, aimed at building leadership to reduce poverty in small rural and reservation communities (population less than 5000) in the Foundation’s 8-state service area. The program is delivered by eight Delivery Organizations, each providing coaching, training and resources to the 153 communities participating in this segment.

This report is the fourth in a series of six reports on the program by the external evaluators. (A full description of the evaluation and its methods, as well as copies of the full LeadershipPlenty® segment report may be requested from info@nwaf.org). This version of the Executive Summary is intended for participating communities, Delivery Organizations and other Horizons partners, to provide results helpful for understanding accomplishments and challenges as the program progresses.

This report addresses the LeadershipPlenty® segment. During this phase of Horizons, each participating community was required to recruit at least three local trainers and involve a minimum of 25 people in 30-40 hours of leadership training.

This report is a complete look at the LeadershipPlenty® segment, based on analysis of pre- and/or post- LeadershipPlenty® surveys, completed by 4287 participants, and on the results of the second round of the ongoing Panel Study; repeated interviews with a sample of approximately half (46%) of the participating Horizons communities. The second wave of 142 Panel Study interviews focused directly on LeadershipPlenty®, including information on participation, learning about poverty and leadership, and evidence about community action and change. These hour-long phone interviews were completed between September 15 and November 1. Interviews with a sample of LeadershipPlenty® trainers were also completed during that time. The insights provided by these in-depth interviews are, we believe, absolutely critical to an informed understanding of Horizons and its effects on communities



Horizons is an 18-month program with five required segments. Participating communities are required to meet certain benchmarks for each segment before they can move forward to the next. The graphic above describes the Horizons segments, timelines and intended outcomes.

**Summary of Horizons
LeadershipPlenty® Findings**

Successfully Mobilizing Diverse Participation. The data strongly indicate that Horizons has been successful thus far in recruiting a demographically diverse group of individuals to participate in leadership training. A total of 4,240 people completed the LeadershipPlenty® training in the 153 Horizons communities, an average of 28 per

community. In addition, 487 Horizons participants were certified as trainers, allowing them to train this first cohort of leaders, as well as enabling subsequent training in the community. The participants included 64% who reported that they had no previous leadership training; and just 15.5% who characterized themselves as “a person who makes community decisions.” Importantly, too, almost 40% of the LeadershipPlenty® participants reported that they were at or below 200% of federal poverty guidelines. These statistics have led us to conclude that significant efforts made by Delivery Organizations and local Steering Committees to recruit low income persons were generally successful. Communities were also successful in recruiting culturally diverse participants, mirroring, in general, the demographics of participating communities.

New Knowledge and Skills at Work in the Community. Participants in training were able to acquire new knowledge and new skills. While skill development is important, interview findings suggested that, in many cases, participants had also quickly put those new skills to work, both at work and in the community, particularly in addressing conflict within the community.

Empowerment and Collective Leadership. Given the broad goals of Horizons, we find it particularly significant that the LeadershipPlenty® training appears to have been 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.” As a result, communities told us that they were experiencing renewed volunteerism. In some cases, we were told that many new people were applying to serve on local boards and in organizational leadership roles. In many communities, people told us that more and more residents are showing up at meetings and volunteering to work on community enhancement activities. Many of those showing up are doing so for the first time, as young people are empowered to take on leadership roles in the community or as relative newcomers now feel welcomed to participate in community activities.

Enhanced Civic Engagement. Horizons communities are also seeing what they tell us is greatly enhanced civic engagement. In nearly all panel study communities, interviewees told us that new people were taking a role in program activities. In a substantial number of communities, interviewees told us, unprompted, that people are showing up and speaking up, often for the first time in memory, at city council, town board and school board meetings. Communities spoke of a greater willingness to talk about civic issues and to get involved in important community deliberations, on such topics as maintaining local hospitals, creating better communications infrastructure, developing municipal sewer systems, and school district budgets. In a small, but possibly significant number of communities, we learned of Horizons participants standing for elected office, running for Mayor, school board or city councils.

Significant Successes

Successful Community Leadership Development. We have concluded that the Horizons program’s emphasis on, and delivery of, leadership development has been very successful in most communities. Communities were able to mobilize participation in LeadershipPlenty®, and those involved believe they have benefited significantly in new knowledge, new understanding of leadership and new skills that they have been able to use. Communities have also benefited in having newly empowered and more confident leaders and community volunteers, and in expanded participation in the civic life of the community. This level of engagement extends beyond the poverty focus of Horizons to a variety of civic issues. Communities tell us that the entire process has made them more optimistic and hopeful about the future. These are positive outcomes.

Program Leadership Outcomes Achieved.

These data make it clear that the outcomes of the LeadershipPlenty® segment have been achieved. Communities have clearly come to define leadership for poverty reduction as collective, rather than individual; in nearly every community our interviewees talked about inclusion, participation and collective action. Communities have been very successful in engaging and building the capacity of new community leaders. People are speaking up and leading groups who once

thought they could never take on such a role. These new leaders are more confident, more skillful and more committed to the community. In addition, communities have been able to achieve a reasonable degree of success in engaging people living in poverty in leadership training and action planning. The engagement of people in poverty, and persons of color, remains a challenge and an opportunity for Horizons communities.

Challenges Going Forward

Issues Around Poverty. Data suggest that a number of challenges remain as communities enter the final phase of Horizons. While some in communities, and some communities, can clearly articulate the links between the community actions they have already taken and still hope to take and poverty reduction, most have trouble finding the connection. While most communities acknowledged that the awareness of poverty and its many manifestations has increased, stereotypes and denial remain. In many communities, even those where “just about everyone is poor,” people still find it difficult to acknowledge and admit that there is poverty in the community. Some communities tell us that they still do not use the “poverty word,” believing that it inhibits engagement in Horizons.

Maintaining a Strong, Clear Focus on Community Poverty Reduction. Importantly, many of the activities that communities have undertaken have what appears to be a tenuous connection to long-term poverty reduction. For example, virtually all communities have undertaken some level of community beautification, ranging from trash hauling to storefront painting to barrels of flowers downtown. Nearly all communities can articulate the link between these activities and community pride; most have more difficulty connecting these activities to poverty. The community visioning activities were either just beginning or were underway during our last interviews, so it is possible that this judgment is premature. However, we suggest that maintaining a strong, clear, focus on community poverty reduction needs to be an emphasis for Delivery Organizations’ continued community coaching. Communities in which poverty was clearly and directly emphasized have achieved more success in attracting people in poverty, and in focusing activities directly on poverty issues.

Regaining Stalled Momentum. A second challenge for Delivery Organizations and for communities is to maintain the momentum that was so clearly evident following the Study Circles segment. In a number of Horizons communities, momentum seems to have stalled as communities necessarily took the summer months to focus on agriculture and tourism. In some communities, the seemingly repetitive nature of action planning and community goal setting, has discouraged some who wonder aloud, “didn’t we do this already?” In nearly all communities a very strong action bias prevails, and some feel that there has been too much talk and not enough action.

Integrating New and Existing Community Leaders. A third challenge will require communities to begin to integrate the work and the efforts of the new and newly empowered leaders with the work of elected and tribal officials, and other established leaders in the communities. Emerging as a theme in our first round of interviews, we followed up to learn whether communities had been successful in engaging both new and established leaders. The record is mixed. In some communities, the mantle of Horizons leadership was taken on by existing organizations or by elected groups. There the connections are clear, and community partnerships and linkages among sectors, particularly between long-time residents and newcomers, seem to be stronger. In other communities, there were reportedly deliberate efforts to bypass existing or elected leaders, and in some cases this has created problems in participation and even some level of suspicion. As noted, in some communities, Horizons participants are stepping up to challenge elected officials. We suggest that the challenge will be to inform and engage, if not to embrace, existing decision-makers so that the whole community is involved in poverty reduction and community enhancement.

Engaging All of the Community. A fourth challenge, perhaps an impossible one, will be to meaningfully engage all segments of the community, including new, Spanish speaking, immigrants and Native Americans. Racism remains an issue in some communities, particularly those with high concentrations of persons of color and on reservation-adjacent communities. This process can be accomplished no more easily in

Horizons communities than in the rest of the nation, but it should remain a goal.

In Conclusion

Do communities believe that Horizons produced results that justified the investments of time, resources and skill?

The LeadershipPlenty® segment of the Horizons program was very successful in broadening community leadership, deepening community leadership and building leadership skills. Leadership skills acquired are being used for community benefit both within Horizons as well as on other community tasks.

After our first several interviews, we met with the interview team, and added a last question: “You are in the elevator (or walking down the street). Someone asks you what you think about the Horizons program you are involved in. You have a few minutes. What would you say?”

The answers show that despite some issues with how Horizons may have rolled out they were pleased to have had the opportunity to participate. Some typical examples from 35 pages of “elevator” quotes follow. Collectively they indicate that, yes, communities believed that the results justified the investments of time, resources and skills. *[Initials indicate the participant's state and/or Delivery Organization – see map.]*

Someone there to bring the community together.

“What I think of Horizons is I have seen it in action for probably the last twelve months now and I think it brings together a lot of ideas of a lot of different programs. And the community coach stays with us throughout the whole process instead of a class once a month for six months and then you're on your own. I see constant coaching and mentoring.... And we are slowly, but surely, addressing some of the issues of spiritual poverty ... housing poverty and business income poverty.” (ID)

Truly community changing. “I would say that the Horizons Program has been truly exciting and really is going to be a community-changing event. Because it has changed the way people think and talk...And it's really helped our community understand how to value what we have and to know that we can do things, on our own.” (IA)

Community issues need community solutions.

“I would say that community issues need to have a community solution. And that Horizons is a way for people to come together ... to work together across

a cross section of the community to come up with community solutions.” (MN)

It broadened my horizons. “It has broadened my It would really seem ironic if I said horizons, wouldn't it? That is my perspective. I was raised in a very modest upbringing and it ... reminded me of where I came from and my roots and problems and difficulties that I experience. (It) sort of brought me full circle to realize ... that people, regardless of their situation, want a better life ... a better community and this program, this process went a long way towards reminding me of that and my obligations to the community.” (MT)

You'll be amazed. “I would say, do your research ... talk to people who have already been in the Horizons Project. Check out your relationship with your County Agent. You might never have known them before ... The program is excellent given the chance. Bring in ten of your friends and maybe ten people you don't know and put it together and you will be amazed at the progress.” (ND)

Time for communities to heal. “It's time for communities to heal and I think this is a process that brings it about. We have (such a) need here ... We have a high rate of suicide. We have a lot of social ills. Our kids in our schools ... their achievement level is very minimal ... I think the Northwest Foundation is a great foundation ... I believe that community people have so much strength in them and they don't even realize until you see a focus on it. We came to that point several times in the training where 'look at us ... look at how strong we are as people. Look at how much we can do if we put our minds together. We can overcome so many things.’” (SBC - ND)

Gives hope ... that things don't have to stay the same. “I think I would tell them that this is a program that gives hope ... that things don't have to stay the same. That there are people who care and want to be involved in making a difference, in the community.” (SD)

Giving your community back to the people.

“Horizons is a project that brings communities together. And if it's done well and effectively you will bring people into the community that you might never have even realized were there. That the growth and the change that you will see is not just with the young people or the marginalized people, but with everyone. It's giving your community back to the people ... it's (giving) power to the people is how it feels. And that's what it's really all about ... it's giving the power to the people to change.” (WA)

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