

# PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES PROSPEROUS NATION

*Enabling Local Action Toward Prosperity for All*

## Vision

We create strong communities nationwide, and in the process, change the way the United States approaches poverty to a whole-system approach that reflects shared responsibility, action, and benefits among all sectors of society. As we are successful:

- Communities across the country will create conditions that maximize the potential for all residents to prosper.
- The momentum from a nation of communities engaging in successful whole-system planning and action will create a societal view that reducing poverty and creating prosperous conditions for all is:
  - A systemic issue in which everyone has a stake and a role in solving,
  - A way to truly embody the principles upon which the nation is founded,
  - A way to ensure sustainable national prosperity and security,
  - An exercise in developing self-sustaining conditions at the individual, family, community, and societal levels,
  - A win-win for society, institutions, and individuals, and
  - A way to create conditions that encourage continued innovation, economic growth, strong relationships, non-violence, health and harmony.
- National strategies and policies will change to create and support conditions for all residents to prosper.

## Mission

Prosperous Communities, Prosperous Nation engages communities nationwide in whole-system planning and action to create increasingly prosperous conditions for their residents. We use the Future Search methodology, which has been proven to create high commitment to implementation and produce successful outcomes in communities across the globe. We leverage all participating communities' work toward national planning and action by engaging policy makers in the community-level planning and in additional policy-level planning that focuses on creating the enabling conditions for our nation's communities.

## Strategic Goals

The goals of the program reflect the local benefits that have already been proven possible by Future Search's track record and the national benefits that are possible as an extension of local success. As a result of the program, we will see:

- Local leaders with the confidence and capacity to employ effective ways of working with large diverse groups toward a common goal.
- Ownership and engagement among community members in the future of their community.
- Communities across the country creating common ground, developing new anti-poverty strategies, and building true commitment for implementing the strategies they develop.
- Diverse stakeholders collaborating on concrete projects that create prosperous conditions for all residents.
- Citizens enabled to do things collectively that they were unable to accomplish alone.
- Citizens having a voice in community issues and working interdependently under a shared umbrella of values and principles.
- Communities across the country sharing information and resources about how they address their issues of poverty and support prosperity for all residents.
- Over time, healthier communities in which residents actively work together to ensure that all members of the community can reach their potential.
- Over time, a critical mass of supporters for new approaches to addressing poverty and creating prosperity in every region of the country.
- Over time, new policy at all levels that enable individuals, families, and communities to become and remain prosperous.
- Over time, a new embedded national culture in which residents actively work together to ensure that all members of society can reach their potential.

## Action Research Goals

In addition to local implementation and strategic goals, we intend for this project to answer key questions critical to the future of poverty efforts in the United States. These questions cannot be answered with confidence at present by any research method that does not bring all the affected parties into dialogue with one another.

- How much more are local communities capable of doing for themselves beyond what they are doing now?
- What are the minimum essential services that can only be provided by state and federal government agencies?
- How can government funds be leveraged to support local initiatives that get results?
- How can the structural barriers that contribute to poverty be addressed?

## Activities

There are four main activities of the PCPN program and a learning community component that ties everything together (see graphic, next page).

### **Local Leaders Capacity Building**

Building local leadership capacity is critical to success in any community-wide effort to address poverty and create prosperity. This component prepares leaders (defined as anyone in the community who is willing to plan for and engage the community in a Prosperous Community Future Search session) to engage their communities in a planning and action process to address poverty and create more prosperous conditions for all residents.

### **Prosperous Community Future Search Sessions**

The “whole system” is convened in a Future Search session in each community. Here, communities discover shared history, meaning, and aspirations for the future, and create practical plans that the whole community supports and commits to implementing. Participating communities are supported by professionally trained facilitators throughout the whole planning and follow up process.

### **Follow Up and Evaluation**

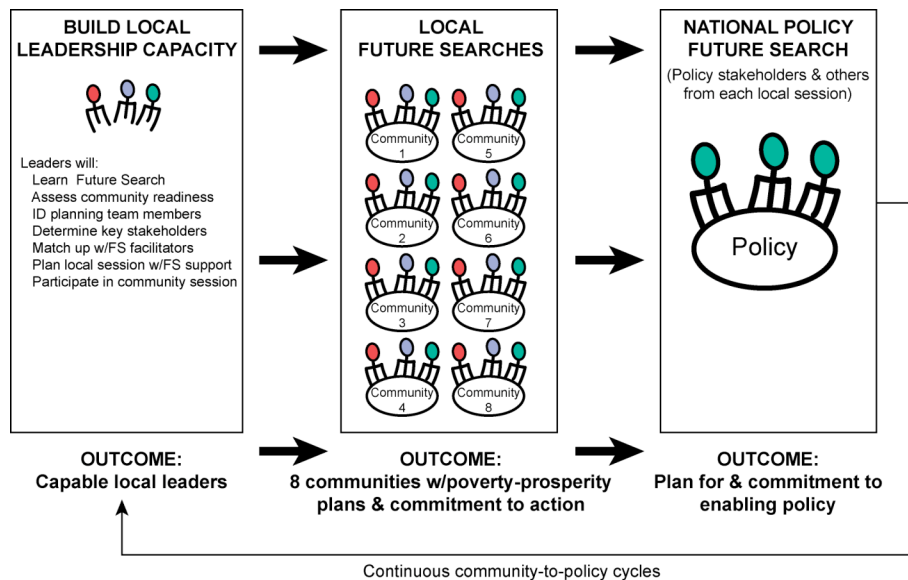
Communities often begin implementing their plans immediately after the Future Search session. PCPN will follow up with communities six months and one year after the Prosperous Community session to encourage and support their progress, evaluate the success of the session, and collect data to inform the national roll-up effort.

### **National Roll-Up and Prosperous Communities Policy Sessions**

For every eight community sessions, one policy session will be convened, establishing a cycle of community-to-policy planning and action that bridges the gap between the community – where the issues of poverty are directly experienced and the implications of policy are felt – and the policy making engine, which is typically isolated from community-level realities and the implications of its policies. Additionally, themes of higher-level obstacles that hinder communities’ ability to create and sustain local prosperity will be documented and used to inform the national session.

### **Learning Community**

A national learning community will be created among participating communities. Communities will have access to an email listserve, information, action plans, learning, and progress of other participating communities, and reports on the progress and momentum toward new national approaches that emerge as a result of the cumulative community-to-policy planning and implementation. Other resources, articles, newsletters, special events announcements, and links relevant to creating prosperous communities will also be used as vehicles of community-building and learning. Public areas on the web site will summarize key learning and progress for anyone interested, thereby extending local learning and progress to a broader, perhaps global, audience.



## Key Points the Program Addresses

- Poverty is a systemic issue that affects us all and therefore requires systemic thinking, problem solving, and action.
- No one person, organization, political party, or sector has “the answer” that will solve the problem.
- There is currently no national mandate or policy to reduce poverty.
- Although poverty is systemic problem, we have placed the responsibility for solving it on either the government or on the individual living in poverty. Because each of these entities is only a part of the system, expectations that either can solve it alone are unrealistic.
- Government strategies have focused on changing the behavior of individuals living in poverty. We have not placed equal focus on changing the behavior of other parts of the system (e.g. societal institutions).
- Every sector of society has a stake in this issue and all play some role in helping or hindering the ability of individuals, families, communities, and society to thrive.
  - Helping or hindering behaviors are often only apparent when one institution’s behavior or policies are examined *in relation to others*. We have not engaged the whole system in focusing on this dynamic interplay in such a way that would allow us to identify and modify these behaviors.
- Individual strategies within individual sectors (e.g. tax policies, education reform, minimum wage increases, health care reform, job training) are useful, but do not address the whole problem.
- The community is the best level at which to think, plan, and act on issues of poverty because it is where the conditions of poverty are most directly felt, the stakes of doing nothing are most visible, and the benefits of improved conditions are directly experienced.

- Large entities, such as state and Federal government, are often too far away from the realities of communities to determine what is best for addressing their unique issues, nor are they responsible for implementing any strategies they might develop on a community's behalf.
- Prescriptive strategies developed outside a community and attempted within it are rarely successful beyond specific pilot projects.
- Since every community's conditions are different, no one prescribed solution will be effective nationally.
- Communities often have difficulty influencing higher-level policies that would create the enabling conditions they need to effectively to create and sustain prosperous conditions.

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