ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This discussion guide was produced by the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) in partnership with Everyday Democracy and the Farm Foundation. It is based on *Thriving Communities: Working Together to Move from Poverty to Prosperity for All*, published in 2006 by Everyday Democracy.

The SRDC wishes to thank Everyday Democracy for allowing us to modify the original document in order for it to better align with the poverty issues and community features that are more commonplace in the Southern region of the U.S. Furthermore, the Center wishes to acknowledge the Northwest Area Foundation for its key role in launching the Horizons Project, an effort designed to help people address poverty in rural and reservation communities situated across a seven state region from Minnesota to the Pacific Northwest. Indeed, Horizons has served as an effective and successful model for the SRDC to emulate.

This guidebook serves as a starting place for open and fair discussions about poverty and the factors that may be contributing to its persistence in the U.S. It is based on research and national surveys, and includes a range of views on the subject. And it builds on the real-life experiences of people who have worked on tackling poverty where they live. It is designed as a tool to help people move from dialogue to action and change in their communities.

*Turning the Tide on Poverty* is available at the following Southern Rural Development Center website:  
http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/

About the Authors and Editors:

The *Turning the Tide on Poverty Community Circles Guide* is the product of many talented contributors. This work was adapted from *Thriving Communities: Working Together to Move from Poverty to Prosperity for All* written by Brad Rourke.¹ Wanting to give the guide a “Southern flavor,” Lionel J. Beaulieu and Rachel Welborn of the Southern Rural Development Center edited and expanded on Rourke’s work, adapting to the South’s unique culture and history. In addition, a team of reviewers provided key insights into the development of this final document. Initial reviewers included Keydron Guinn (Southern University), LaVonya Malveaux (Southern University), and Tim Slack (Louisiana State University). A second wave of reviewers helped tweak the final *Turning the Tide on Poverty* guide. These valuable colleagues include Molly Barrett (Everyday Democracy), Sally Campbell (Everyday Democracy), and Alice Diebel (The Kettering Foundation). © 2009

¹ Materials adapted from *Thriving Communities: Working Together to Move from Poverty to Prosperity for All* (2006) were developed by Everyday Democracy and the Northwest Area Foundation. Everyday Democracy is a national organization that explores ways to help all kinds of people think, talk and work together to solve problems. Created in 1989 by The Paul J. Aicher Foundation, Everyday Democracy has worked with more than 600 communities across the United States on a variety of public issues. Learn more at [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org).

The Northwest Area Foundation is dedicated to helping communities reduce poverty for the long term. It was founded in 1934 by Louis W. Hill, whose father, James J. Hill, founded the Great Northern Railway. The Northwest Area Foundation works in the eight states served by the railway. Learn more at [www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org).
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INTRODUCTION

Overview of Turning the Tide on Poverty and Community Circles

Many people across America want to live in communities that are vibrant and where their important goals in life can be realized. These are hopes and dreams that people have no matter where they live, whether in a rural area, a small town or city, a suburban community, or a large urban neighborhood.

People have different views of things they like or dislike about their community. But, when they discuss the problems that are holding their community back, the one issue that gets mentioned a good bit is poverty.

Poverty is pretty much everywhere. It may look different in rural places than it does in larger cities or suburbs. Poverty may be experienced in many different ways by individuals. For instance, a single parent may see poverty in terms of how many jobs it will take to earn enough to have a place to live. To elderly persons who have lived through the Great Depression, the level of poverty today may not seem all that bad. For someone who just lost a job, poverty may mean struggling to figure out how to pay the bills that are due. New arrivals to the United States may think that the local poverty in their community is nothing in comparison to what it was in their home country. For those who live in a community where almost everyone is poor, it may seem hard to imagine what life without poverty would look like. In all of these different situations, there is one thing that rings true – the challenges of poverty cut across all types of communities. The question is, “What can we do to turn the tide on poverty in our community?”

This discussion guide will help us talk about the kind of community we want. Few places can do well if many of their residents live in poverty. When we work to reduce poverty, we take an important step in building a better community. Strong communities focus their energies on making life better for all of their residents. So, if we want to have a thriving community, it is important to build a shared vision of the type of community we want, and then to act on that vision by working hard to make life better for all people in our community.

About Community Circle

What Is a Community Circle?

Community Circles are small, diverse groups of people that meet several times to talk about an important community issue, like poverty.

The goal of Community Circles is to bring about positive change in the community. First, people look at how poverty has touched their lives. Then, they share their thoughts and beliefs about why poverty continues to exist. Next, they look at different ways to reduce poverty, including some of the pluses and minuses associated with these possible approaches. Then, people decide on the Action Ideas that they feel are the best fit for their community. Finally, they work together to take action on the best ideas they have selected.
How a Community Circle Works

A Community Circle is a step-by-step process for examining tough issues that communities are facing today. Each session of the Community Circle builds on the one before it. This guidebook is a tool to help us look at poverty in our community and to explore the right mix of approaches that can bring about positive changes in our community.

What Is a Community-Wide Circle Program?

- Many circles meet at the same time.
- 8 to 12 people are part of each circle. They come from different groups in the community.
- Groups meet together for five, two-hour sessions.
- Each group uses this guide.
- After the circles finish meeting, members of all the circles meet together in an Action Forum.
- The whole group decides on actions to take to help address poverty in the community.

Why Might a Community Circle Program Work for Us?

- People care. They want to make things better.
- Problems like poverty call for many solutions.
- It takes people from all parts of our community to solve problems.
- When we all join in, we all win.
- When we talk face-to-face, we get to know each other. That helps build trust.
- Working together, we can develop better ideas and plans.

Why Use Community Circles to Talk about Poverty?

Some people are already working on reducing poverty in our community. But to move ahead, more of us have to get involved. Community Circles can help people learn more about what is being done to overcome poverty. By learning about our community together, more people will see why it is so important to get involved. Community Circles can bring new life and ideas to what people are already doing. They can help make these current efforts even bigger, better and more successful. They can help uncover needs that sometimes get overlooked, or offer new ways to reduce poverty in our community.
Community Circle Session Outline

**Session One: How Are We Connected to Our Community and Poverty**
- Get to know each other
- Talk about how we are connected to the issue
- Begin to look at poverty

**Session Two: A Vision for Our Community - What Poverty Looks Like Here**
- Create a vision of a community where everybody thrives
- Talk about what poverty looks like in our community

**Session Three: Why Do We Have Poverty in Our Community?**
- Talk about why poverty exists here

**Session Four: Reaching Our Vision and Reducing Poverty**
- Talk about ways to reduce poverty
- Talk about the benefits and costs of each possible approach
- Identify possible Action Ideas

**Session Five: Moving to Action - Working Together to Make Good Things Happen**
- Talk about assets in our community
- Talk about how to make our best Action Ideas happen
- Select our best Action Ideas to take to the Action Forum

**The Action Forum**

After the fifth session, we will meet with other community circles in an Action Forum. We will collect Action Ideas from all of the Community Circles. At the Action Forum, we will select the Action Ideas that the group feels will work best for our community. People can sign up to help put the action plans into motion, or to learn more about what we are planning to do.
Poverty Can Be about More Than Money

Even though poverty has been around a long time, it is pretty hard to get people to agree on the definition. When people in communities talk about poverty, they often speak about:

- Feeling hopeless
- Doing without
- Working more than one job and still not making ends meet
- Being on a downward path
- Feeling ashamed to invite people over
- Sending kids to school hungry or with clothes that don’t fit
- Being turned away even if you are able to work
- Having trouble finding a good place to live
- Not being able to pay the bills

Some people talk about poverty in terms of money. The U.S. Census Bureau states that the poverty threshold (the official manner in which we determine how many people are poor in the United States) for a family of four (one adult and three related children under 18 years old) is just under $22,050 per year (as of 2010).* Living on less than these amounts means you are “in poverty.” Many people think these numbers are too low. Others think the poverty figure is not accurate because it only includes cash income (such as the wages or salaries you earn in a job), and not non-cash items such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly called Food Stamps), housing assistance, or TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, formerly called Welfare).

Some believe that the poverty line should be based upon the cost of living in different communities. Some believe the poverty line should be higher for people living in larger cities. For example, it is a lot harder for a family to make ends meet if they live in a big city like Atlanta, Georgia, than if they live in a small, rural town.

Some people say that there are different kinds of poverty. Some think of poverty as a person who is all alone, without the support of family and friends. Others believe poverty refers to a person who might not have the skills to handle day-to-day life. Poverty is not always about individuals. It can affect whole communities. That is why this guide is so important. It is designed to help local people and groups talk and work together to reduce poverty.

*For more information on the latest poverty guidelines, go to [http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty](http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty)
Overview

Purpose of this Session:
In this first session, we will get acquainted with one another, talk about what is important to us in our community, and see how we can work together.

Goals for this Session:
• Get to know each other.
• Talk about how we are connected to the poverty issue.
• Begin to look at poverty.

Handouts:
• Sample Ground Rules
• Overview of Turning the Tide on Poverty & Community Circles

Materials:
• Sign-in sheet
• Session summary
• Nametags
• Flip chart
• Markers
• Tape

Charts:
• Ground Rules – Make a chart with the sample ground rules listed below. Leave space for the group to recommend additional rules if they choose. You should plan to bring this chart back to every session.
• Action Ideas – This should be a blank chart labeled with the heading “Action Ideas.” Bring this chart back to every session so that the group can keep adding items during each session.

PART A: Understanding Community Circles (30 minutes)

It will be very important to help the group feel comfortable in this first session. Be sure each person has a chance to speak so that the views of the entire group can be heard. Some people find it easier than others to discuss this subject. Give everyone room and time to get comfortable talking in the circle.

From the start, participants may come up with ideas about what to do to reduce poverty. Keep a list of Action Ideas on a flip chart. Post the list where everyone can see it during each session and add ideas as people think of them. Assure the group that they will have time to share their ideas in greater depth in Sessions Four and Five.
Read the overview to the group from the handout or from the beginning of this book (pages 4-5). Another alternative is to ask for volunteers to read different sections of the handout. Avoid going around the circle asking each person to read a certain section. Remember that some people do not feel comfortable or confident reading out loud. The overview tells us what a Community Circle is all about and how it might be a helpful way to engage in discussion of poverty (or other challenging issues).

**Handout: Overview of Turning the Tide on Poverty and Community Circles**

Explain that a Community Circle is a place for the group to talk and work together. The facilitator’s role is to help make sure the discussions go well and are useful. The facilitator is not there to take sides or to react to the group’s comments.

Most sessions take about two hours to complete. If the group agrees, they can choose to talk longer. There are many questions in each session. But, the group doesn’t have to cover every question. The key is to focus on the questions that are most meaningful to the people taking part in the Circle. If time is running short, consider focusing on the questions in bold.

Help participants understand the need to create ground rules so that the Community Circle can work better. Read the sample rules that have been provided and ask the group to share their thoughts about these rules. Ask if there are rules they would like to add. If so, list these on a flip chart (if the group agrees) and have them posted during each session.

**Handout: Sample Ground Rules**

Sample Ground Rules

- Listen to one another. Treat each other with respect.
- Give each person a chance to talk.
- Only one person should talk at a time. Please don’t cut people off.
- Speak for yourself. Avoid speaking for “your group.”
- It’s OK to disagree. If you feel hurt, say so and say why.
- Stick to the issue. No name-calling.
- If you talk about people who are not here, please don’t share their names.
- Some of what we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK.
- Help the facilitator keep things on track.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one should dominate the conversation.
**Part B: About Ourselves (30 Minutes)**

Each person in the circle is encouraged to answer these questions as an introduction:

- Who are you? Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
- Where do you live now?
- Why did you come today?
- What do you hope will come from this Community Circle program?

**Part C: Ties to Our Community and to Poverty (45 Minutes)**

Our group will talk about these questions:

- What do you like about living in this community? What are its strengths? What are some of its weaknesses?
- What is it like now for young people who are growing up in our community?
- Describe a time when you, or someone close to you, struggled to make ends meet. What was it like? How did others react?
- What does it look like in this community when people are doing well? What does it look like when people are struggling?

**Part D: Thinking Back (15 Minutes)**

Our group will talk about these questions:

- What did you learn in this session?
- What stories touched you or surprised you?
- Why is it important for everyone to have a chance to thrive?

**Reflecting and Closing**

- **Thought for the week:** Give some thought to what you like about living in our community. Find some examples. What would it be like if good things happened more often in our community? We will begin our next session with these questions.
- Thank people for coming and sharing, and remind your group of the next meeting. Note that it is very important for everyone to attend every session.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week. In Session Two, we will talk about how we would like our community to be. We will also talk about what poverty looks like in our community.

**Wrap Up**

Gather charts and notes from session. Remember that Ground Rules and Action Ideas charts are used at every session.

Complete a session summary and attach sign-in sheet.
Overview

Purpose of this Session:
We talked about our connections to the community in Session One. We also discussed what it looks like when people are not doing well. In this second session, you will have a chance to share your vision of how you want our community to be in the future. In addition, we’ll talk about what poverty looks like in our local area.

Goals for this Session:
- Create a vision of a community where everybody thrives.
- Talk about what poverty looks like in our community.

Handouts:
- Information Sheet
- Things You Might Find in a Vibrant Community

Materials:
- Sign-in sheet
- Session summary
- Nametags
- Flip chart
- Markers
- Tape

Charts:
- Ground Rules – From Session One
- Action Ideas – From Session One
- Things We Are Already Doing – Create a blank flip chart with this title. As the group identifies things that are already happening to help address poverty, add them to this list. Bring this chart back to all of the remaining sessions
- Our Community Vision – Create a blank flip chart with this as the title. The group will fill it in during this session.

PART A: What Good Things Did We See? (15 minutes)

Post the Ground Rules and Action Ideas charts from Session One. Continue to add to the Action Ideas chart as the group thinks of new items to consider. Remind the group that they will use these notes when they talk about Action Ideas in Sessions Four and Five.

Create the two new charts and post them for use during this session.

Welcome the group and take time for introductions if new members have joined since the last session.
Remind the group of the Ground Rules.

You do not have to cover every question in this session. Choose the ones that you think will work best with your group.

A Look Back

Let’s take a minute to reflect on what may have happened since the last time we met as a Community Circle.

- What did you notice since the last session? When you looked for things you like about living here, what did you see? What would it be like if those things happened more often?
- Did you see anything that surprised you? Did you look at things in your community a bit differently as a result of the discussions we had in Session One? If so, in what ways?

Listen for themes that you may be hearing as the group is talking. Also, notice the Action Ideas and Things We Are Already Doing that are being discussed and make sure to add these to the charts.

PART B: A Vision for Our Community (60 minutes)

Imagine a place in the community that most residents visit or pass by on a regular basis. Perhaps it is a main road in the community or the local park. It is also a place that visitors are likely to see when they drive through the community and an area that local school buses pass by each day.

Let’s imagine that we decide to build a monument that represents a vision of what we want our community to be. We want to carve words into that monument that represent words of hope.

We need to find words that best describe our hopes and dreams for building a thriving community. There is only room for four or five words. Our group has to select these words.

Handout:

1. Look at Things You Might Find in a Vibrant Community (handout) for examples of words that might be carved into the monument. The facilitator should read the ideas out loud or ask for volunteers to read.

- What words from this list do you want to consider keeping for our monument? (Facilitator: write these on a flip chart.)
- What words would you like to add to this list? (Facilitator: allow time for brainstorming – add the words that people have offered on the flip chart.)
- Ask each person to think quietly for a moment about which three words are most important to them personally.
2. Now, you will form groups of three or four. In your small group, talk about:

- Which ideas matter most to you?
- What do the words mean?
- Try to come up with a list of three words that your small group can agree on.

3. Return to the whole group and share your ideas. Together, we will try to agree on five words to carve into the monument. Each small group will say which three words they chose and why. (Facilitator: Mark the words selected on the flip chart as each group reports back.)

- Which ideas are similar? Which ideas are different?
- What five words seem to capture the main ideas that we think are important? Let’s try to agree on five words for our monument. (Facilitator: Don’t worry if the large group cannot reach agreement on exactly five words. Help them think through and come as close as they can. Once the group has decided, list the five words on the flip chart labeled Our Community Vision. Save this list. You will use it again in Session Five.)
- How do you feel about the list of words that we’ve selected?
- Imagine what it would be like to live in a place like this.

Things You Might Find in a Vibrant Community

- **Opportunity**: Everyone has an equal chance to succeed. There are local resources and opportunities for all.
- **Respect**: People treat each other fairly and have respect for each other.
- **Order**: Things run smoothly. People do what they are supposed to do.
- **Safety**: People feel secure. They are not too worried about crime or drugs. They don’t think their things will be stolen or damaged.
- **Prosperity**: The community is growing and the economy is strong. Businesses are successful, and there are plenty of jobs that pay good wages.
- **Health**: People are healthy. It is easy to get access to good health care.
- **Diversity**: There are all kinds of people in the community. They come into contact with each other often. They can all work together and help each other.
- **Spirituality**: People feel connected to something larger than themselves.
- **Cultural Openness**: People understand their culture and keep it alive in their day-to-day activities. People take pride in their heritage.
- **Caring**: People work together to help local youth, the elderly, and those who are faced with some tough challenges.
Part C: What Does Poverty Look Like Here? (45 Minutes)

We have talked about our vision, but poverty still exists here.

Look at the list of ideas under Our Community Vision. As a whole group, talk about these questions:

- Who in our community might think that this vision seems out of reach? Why?
- How does poverty make it tough to create the type of community we described in our vision?

The committee involved in planning this Community Circle program has put together an Information Sheet on how our community is doing. Give copies to participants.

- What do you think of these facts? What facts are most surprising to you?
- What does the information seem to be telling us about our community?

Reflecting and Closing

- Thought for the week: Think about the words we chose for our monument. See if you can find some examples of these ideas in the community. We will begin our next session with these questions.
- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind your group that it is very important for everyone to attend every session. Remind them of date, time, and location.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week. In Session Three, we will look at why we have poverty in our community.

Gather charts and notes from session. Keep all notes as a reference.

Be ready to post these at the next session: Ground Rules, Action Ideas, Community Vision, and Things We Are Already Doing.

Complete a session summary and attach the sign-in sheet.
Overview

Purpose of this Session:
In Session Two, we talked about our vision for the community. We also briefly discussed poverty and what it looks like in our community. Now we will look at why poverty exists in our community.

Goal for this Session:
- Talk about poverty and the reasons why it is found in our community.

Handout:
- Why Do We Have Poverty?

Materials:
- Sign-in sheet
- Session summary
- Flip chart
- Markers
- Tape

Charts:
- Ground Rules – From Session One
- Action Ideas – From Session One
- Things We Are Already Doing – From Session Two
- Our Community Vision – From Session Two

PART A: Getting Started (15 minutes)

Post the charts listed for this section. Continue adding to the Action Ideas and Things We Are Already Doing charts as those items come up in the discussion.

Welcome the group and review the Ground Rules before beginning the discussion.

A Look Back

Since our last session:

- What examples of our vision for the community did you find? Did you see examples that made you feel hopeful about achieving our vision? What were they?
- What examples did you find that made you unhappy or upset? Why?
PART B: Why Is There Poverty Here? (1 hour and 45 minutes)

Try to keep the group discussing why there is poverty and not allow them to become too focused on what to do about it at this point.

As the group talks through the different views, make sure that every view is considered. If a view is being left out of the discussion, draw participants’ attention to it by saying something like, “I’ve noticed no one has mentioned view #___. What do you think about it?”

In two of our upcoming sessions (Session Four and Session Five), our Community Circle will talk about possible solutions to poverty. But, before we can figure out what to do, we need to know more about why poverty is a problem here in our community.

Poverty has many faces. People have different views about what causes it and why it stays with us. One view cannot tell the whole story. We will take a few minutes to read some of the possible reasons why poverty exists. As you listen to these views, think about which views are closest to your own and why. Which ones do you not agree with? Why would someone agree with those views? Try to be open to the reasons as we read.

Handout: Why Do We Have Poverty
(Facilitator: Ask for volunteers to read the sections aloud or be prepared to read them yourself.)

We will use the questions under “Discussing the Views” on the handout to talk about these views when we have finished reading them. We will not talk about solutions right now. We will do that in a future meeting of our group. But, if you think of a way to reduce poverty, we will write it down on the list of Action Ideas.

Discussing the Views

These questions will help you talk about the views:

• Which views are closest to your own? (You may agree with more than one.) Why?
• Think about a view you don’t agree with. Why would someone agree with that view? Try to be open to the reasons why others would support this specific view of poverty.
• Do some of these views surprise you? Which ones and why?
• Which views seem to conflict with each other?
• What views would you like to add to our list?
• If we want to achieve Our Community Vision (from Session Two), which views are most important to work on?
• Are there any of the views we have not discussed yet? What do you think of these views?
Why Do We Have Poverty?

Here are some different views about why poverty exists.

**View #1: Bad Things Can Happen**
People can get sick or hurt. Health insurance, even when people can get it, will not always cover all the costs. Medical bills can push a person or a family into poverty. What if you lose your job or get divorced? Or what if there is a disaster, like a tornado or hurricane? When things like these happen, it can be hard to make ends meet.

**View #2: Poor Education/Poor Schools**
Children from low-income families often attend public schools that are poorly funded while wealthy families may send their children to private schools or charter schools. Without resources and quality teachers, students attending these poorer schools can’t get the education and training they need to get and keep a job. The drop-out rate is high. It is tough for these kids to compete with children who go to better schools. This means they are less likely to get into college and less likely to qualify for good paying jobs. So they end up being poor.

**View #3: Not Enough Jobs or Only Low Wage Jobs**
In some places, there just are not enough jobs. If there are jobs, they only pay low wages. People want to work, but they can’t find a job that will pay the bills. Some people hold two or more jobs, but they still cannot make enough to cover all their expenses. Lots of people who work are still in poverty. And they can’t be sure that their jobs will last. Many businesses move away and take jobs with them or just end up closing their doors. Lots of people who work are still in poverty.

**View #4: Racism**
Some people and groups have tried to keep people down because of their skin color or because they come from a different ethnic group. People of color are more likely to be in poverty. And for people of color, it may be even harder to get out of poverty. Banks, bosses, schools and real estate agents may treat people of color or from different ethnic groups unfairly. Sometimes these barriers tend to keep people in poverty.

**View #5: Content with the Status Quo**
Some people are content with things the way they are or just don’t want to rock the boat. Some people that have money think poverty doesn’t affect them so they don’t try to help make things better. Some that are in poverty don’t think anything will ever changes so they don’t try to get out of poverty.

**View #6: Bad Public Policy**
Some public policies can keep people from trying to stand on their own. Some programs, like TANF (Welfare) or SNAP (Food Stamps), get abused or are used in the wrong way. Some policies may be unfair to certain groups of people. Sometimes, government programs that seem like good ideas end up not working well or have bad side effects.
View #7: People Don’t Take Responsibility
Some people just don’t take personal responsibility. They don’t look hard enough for jobs or they refuse to work. They don’t use programs or resources, such as job training, or classes to complete their GED. They turn to drugs, gambling, alcohol, or crime. Some misuse credit and buy more than they can afford, which leads them to poverty.

View #8: Division by Social Class
Even though we don’t want to admit it, every community is divided by class. There are people who have money and resources and there are those who have few, if any, of these resources. In between these two groups are members of the middle class. Sometimes these class divisions make us think that we cannot work together to get anything done about poverty. And sometimes those with power and money control what happens in the community. They just look out for themselves and take care of their friends by providing them with jobs and favors. They keep everyone else down which hurts community spirit.

View #9: Lack of a Support Network
Money is not the only thing people need to succeed in life. They need a network of people and groups that can offer other kinds of help along the way. They may need help with job training, transportation, child care, or just moral support when things are getting them down. Some need help to get over addictions or depression. Without support from family, friends, and the community, it is hard to get out of poverty.

View #10: Growing Number of Single Parent Families
More and more children are being born to single-parent families. It is hard to keep a job and care for your children when you are a single parent. Having only one paycheck makes it difficult to pay for childcare, to buy enough food for the family or to have a car to get to work. There just isn’t enough money or time to take care of everything a family needs.

Reflecting and Closing

- Thought for the week: Think about these views on what causes poverty. See if you hear them from others in the community.
- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind your group that it is very important for everyone to attend every session.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week. In Session Four, we will talk about what we can do to reduce poverty.

Gather notes and charts for this session to keep as a reference.

Be prepared to post these charts again at the next session: Action Ideas, Our Community Vision, Things We Are Already Doing, and Ground Rules.

Complete a session summary and attach the sign-in sheet.
Overview

Purpose of this Session:
In Session Three, we examined a variety of reasons why people are living in poverty. In this session, we are going to talk about what we can do to reduce poverty.

Goals for this Session:
- Talk about ways to reduce poverty.
- Talk about the benefits and costs of each possible approach.
- Identify possible Action Ideas that fit Our Community Vision (from Session Two).

Handouts:
- Ways to Reduce Poverty
- What We Can Do

Materials:
- Sign-in sheet
- Session summary
- Flip chart
- Markers
- Tape

Charts:
- Ground Rules – From Session One
- Action Ideas – From Session One
- Things We Are Already Doing – From Session Two
- Our Community Vision – From Session Two

PART A: Getting Started (10 minutes)

Post the charts listed above from other sessions. Continue adding Action Ideas and Things We Are Already Doing as these ideas are mentioned.

Welcome the group and review the Ground Rules.

A Look Back

Since our last session:
- Did you hear any of the views of why there is poverty in the community since our last meeting?
- Did anything surprise you? If so, tell us about it.
PART B: Exploring Approaches to Tackling Poverty (1 hour and 20 minutes)

Your notes on this section include examples of how each approach might look in a community. The participants’ handout does not include these examples. Use them only if the group seems to need examples in order to understand what is meant by one of the approaches. If they seem to understand without the examples, do not read them.

Make sure all sides of each approach get a full and fair discussion. Explore the trade-offs that might need to happen for an approach to work.

The group does not have to agree on every point. What they need to do during this time is find areas of common concern and understanding.

Once you have introduced this section, ask for volunteers to read each approach aloud or be prepared to read them yourself.

Record new ideas on the Action Ideas and Things We Are Already Doing sheets as they are discussed.

Make sure that all sides of each approach get a full and fair hearing. Discuss each approach until the group understands why some people value it.

During this session, we will talk about some possible approaches to tackling poverty. The approaches listed on the handout, Ways to Reduce Poverty, will help us come up with ideas for steps we can take to reduce poverty in our community. As we talk, we will think about what might work here and what might make an approach hard.

Handout: Ways to Reduce Poverty

We will use these ideas to talk about how we might want to work to reduce poverty in our community. If you know about other examples of action related to these approaches, be sure to tell us. We will add those ideas to the Action Ideas chart.

On your handout there are questions to discuss. We will use these questions to help us talk about these different approaches.
Ways To Reduce Poverty

Approach #1: Focus on early childhood, youth, and schools

**Supporting**

More young people live in poverty than adults. When people grow up in poverty, they are more likely to stay in poverty. We need to stop this cycle. To prevent poverty later in life, we must meet our children’s basic needs. We must make sure that they have enough food, good schools, good health care, and excellent adult role models.

**Opposing**

The responsibility of raising kids and preparing them for the adult world should fall on the family, not government or the community. Besides, investing in young people is a waste of money since most will leave the community once they graduate. If we are going to invest anywhere, we need to start with the adults, not the children. One of the best predictors of a child’s success in school is the parent’s success.

**Examples**

- Some states offer free health insurance for young people.
- Local business leaders band together with local government and school officials to launch a pre-K school readiness program for disadvantaged kids.
- People call on officials to provide equal funding for schools in wealthy and poor neighborhoods.
- A new Boys and Girls Club provides an opportunity for local adults to mentor young people.
- Some states are expanding their investment in WIC (a program that helps mothers with children under 5 years old to buy healthy foods for their family), Head Start, and other early childhood or school readiness programs.

Approach #2: Create more and better jobs

**Supporting**

We need to support local businesses and create new ones. We should get rid of unfair taxes and rules that tend to hurt businesses. We need to create more jobs that pay enough so people can take care of themselves and their families. Everyone benefits when people are working and are getting paid a decent wage.

**Opposing**

It is not easy to create jobs. It is expensive and time consuming especially when you consider that many business developers seem to shy away from communities that have a high level of poverty. Sometimes banks won’t make loans to start new businesses in poor communities. Even if the jobs were created, we would still have to make sure people were trained for the jobs.

**Examples**

- One community gets more people to visit their area. They get the word out about how good the hunting is in the region, so people travel there during hunting season.
- Some communities encourage residents to buy from local businesses instead of driving to bigger towns to shop. This keeps more of our money in the community.
- Some communities try to keep taxes low. They make sure that new businesses know about all the benefits the town offers.
- Some communities help small businesses get started by letting them share office space and some services until they are ready to be on their own.
- One community works with the local community college to help people who have lost their jobs train for new jobs or careers.
Approach #3: Help people meet basic needs

**Supporting**

We need to make sure everyone has their basic needs met. No one should go hungry. Everyone should have a safe place to sleep. Everyone needs basic services. If there are more services for people who need them, we all will be better off.

**Opposing**

Many programs already help people with basic needs such as food and shelter. Too many people are looking to these programs and to government hand-outs. We need to reduce the number of people who depend on outside help to meet their basic needs. In order to make real change, we need to focus on helping people help themselves through job training, money management, or other skills that will help them stand on their own.

**Examples**

- A community center starts a food pantry. It donates food to people in need.
- A local group convinces a nursing home to convert some units for assisted living, which allows senior citizens to be live more independently.
- A community group makes a list of all the local resources that are available for people who are in need. The list shows where to go for help.
- Local churches work together to repair or build houses to provide low-income families with a good place to live.
- A number of government agencies team up to offer “one-stop” help for people to find jobs and get other services. This makes it easier for people to get the assistance they need without having to travel all over town.

Approach #4: Improve race relations

**Supporting**

Racism hurts everyone and keeps some people in poverty. It affects jobs, loans, housing, arrests, and schooling. African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and others face racism and unfairness every day. We must address the practice of racism by people and by institutions. We must work to create racial equity in our community.

**Opposing**

We have been looking at society through the lens of race far too long. We must stop blaming our problems on race. Today, everyone has the chance to succeed. Minorities who are qualified and willing to work hard can get a fair chance to succeed. Racism is a terrible fact of our history, but it does not determine the actions or beliefs of many people today. It holds back everyone if we continue to act as though it does.

**Examples**

- In one community, a group pairs families from different ethnic groups. They get to know and understand one another.
- A group in one community works with a local hospital to hire Spanish-speaking staff to help Latino patients.
- In one community, a group works with bankers to get them to change lending practices that are unfair to people of color. Several banks stop unfair lending practices.
- A group in one community helps people talk about how segregation is linked to housing and education. They work to get funding from the state to build better low-cost housing.
- One community holds rallies each year to talk about race issues and helps groups to work together to make things better for all races.
Approach #5: Invest in critical community services and resources

Many communities lack essential services and resources. It is important for communities to have decent health care, safe roads and bridges, dependable transportation services, good schools, and up-to-date technology (such as access to the Internet and cell phone services). All of these things are needed for a community to attract and keep good businesses. If we develop these resources, our quality of life will improve. We will be able to attract more people and businesses because they want to move to a good and active community.

It costs a lot to develop resources and services in a community. Many small communities cannot afford to develop or maintain these services. And even if the resources are there, it doesn’t mean that people will use them, or that new businesses will come to our community just because these services are available to them.

- One community is making sure buses are available to meet the transportation needs of workers, the elderly, and low-income residents.
- A local government is installing Internet service and making it available at low cost to local businesses, health care clinics, and other community groups.
- A health care center helps people who do not have health insurance.
- Some places think of local leaders as basic resources. They set up programs to help newly elected leaders learn the ins and outs of their new job.
- One community offers training for men and women of various ages and races, to develop the skills they need to become more actively involved in community-building activities.

Questions to Discuss

We can use these questions to dig deeper into the approaches and opposing views:

- What approaches do you like and why? Which ones are you less likely to support, and why?
- What are the strengths of each approach? What would be the challenges of using these approaches?
- How do you feel about the opposing views? Which ones do you agree with, and why? What opposing views do you disagree with, and why?
- What approaches would you like to add to the list?
- What approaches might move us closer to our vision?
- How might some of these approaches help people in our community get out of poverty?
- Who is likely to help with this approach? Who is likely to oppose it? Why?
- Who is likely to benefit from this approach? What individuals or groups may be harmed or left out if we take this approach?
- What changes will we have to make, if we want to carry out this approach?
- Which approach(es) do you think are most valuable for our community to examine further? Which Action Ideas would you like to add that would support this approach?
Part C: Selecting The Best Ideas (30 Minutes)

We have made a list of Action Ideas as we talked about many ways of reducing poverty.

- Take a look at the list of Action Ideas. What ideas are a good fit with the approaches we think are most promising? Are there other Action Ideas we need to add to carry out the approach(es) we think are most promising?
- Think about things that you can do on your own, things you can do with other small groups of people, and things that the whole community could do, maybe even with government. Look at the handout, “What We Can Do,” for more ideas.
- How many different ideas can we come up with?

Narrow down the list of Action Ideas

Let’s begin to narrow down the list. (We will do this again in the next session.) First, we will combine ideas that are nearly the same. Then, we will think about Our Community Vision (See chart from Session Two) and how to make it happen. Talk about the Questions for Setting Priorities.

Questions for Setting Priorities:

- What five or six Action Ideas seem most realistic and useful?
- Which Action Ideas are the best fit with the approaches we think are most promising?
- Who would work with us on these Action Ideas?
- Are these things we can really get done? Why or why not?
- Have these Action Ideas worked before? What other communities have tried (or are trying) them?

Reflecting and Closing

- Thought of the week: Think about these Action Ideas. Talk to your friends, neighbors, co-workers and others to get their thoughts about some of the Action Ideas. Think about the approaches we have highlighted. Choose one approach and see if you can find people or groups who are already working on this approach.
- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind your group that it is very important for everyone to attend every session.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week. In Session Five, we will select Action Ideas to take to the Action Forum. We will begin by looking at the assets we have that can help our efforts to address poverty.

Gather notes and charts for this session to keep as a reference.

Be prepared to post these charts again at the next session: Action Ideas, Our Community Vision, Things We Are Already Doing, and Ground Rules

Complete a session summary and attach a sign-in sheet.
Overview

Purpose of this Session:
In this session, we will begin to think about how to move to action. First, we will look at the assets we have.

Goals for this Session:
• Talk about the assets in our community.
• Talk about how to make our most promising ideas happen.

Handouts:
• What We Can Do
• The Action Forum

Materials:
• Sign-in sheet
• Session summary
• Flip chart
• Markers
• Tape
• Sticky dots

Charts:
• Ground Rules – From Session One
• Action Ideas – From Session One
• Things We Are Already Doing – From Session Two
• Our Community Vision – From Session Two
• Community Assets – Create a new chart labeled “Community Assets.” (Used in Part A)
• Our Community – Create new chart like the one pictured here. (Used in Part C)

PART A: Our Community Assets? (30 minutes)
Post the charts listed above from previous sessions. Also, post the Community Assets chart.
Welcome the group and remind them of the ground rules.

To begin our discussion today, we need to make a list of our assets (for example, our talents, skills, interests, and physical resources—like land, buildings, space, tools, skills, and money). Every community, group, and person has them. We can use our assets to deal with some of the tough issues our community faces, for instance, poverty.
Assets can be things or people. They are the things that people have or use to help themselves and each other. For example, you can use your car to drive someone who needs a ride or to visit a sick person. Some communities have a culture of taking care of one another. This is an asset, too. Assets can be handed down in families or from group to group.

As you answer the questions, the recorder will write the assets on the “Community Assets” chart.

1. What are some things you know a lot about?
2. What are some talents or skills of other people in the community?
3. What groups do you belong to? How can they help?
4. What other groups in the community can help people in poverty? How can they help?
5. What groups have not been involved in the past, but may be interested if asked?
6. What assets are in our community - like land, buildings, meeting space, tools, or even money that can be used to support our efforts to tackle poverty in our community?

**PART B: Connecting Our Action Ideas with Our Assets (35 minutes)**

Look at our list of Community Assets. Which of these assets link up with our Action Ideas?

For example, let’s assume that one of the approaches we decide to focus on is Approach #1 which deals with early childhood, youth, and schools. One Action Idea may be to start an after-school program. Here is how we could connect this to some of our community assets:

- Action Idea: Provide an after school program for young children that are home alone after school.
- Asset: A group of grandmothers gathers for coffee each afternoon.
- Asset: A senior center has great space that nobody uses in the afternoons.

We can link these three things together. We have a place to hold an after-school program for young people. And there are grandmothers who can help supervise them.

Think about other kinds of links you can make. Doing this will lead to more ideas and remind us of new assets.

**PART C: Setting Our Priorities for Action (35 minutes)**

During this section, the group will need to identify their top three Action Ideas to take to the Action Forum.

Some groups may get bogged down here. They may get stuck thinking about big change projects instead of things that can be done within the community. Help them focus on doable first steps. Bigger projects can build on these early successes.

Post the Our Community Chart next to the Action Ideas, Community Vision, and Community Assets. The Our Community Chart is what will go to the Action Forum. See the example to the right of how the chart should look.
Look again at our list of Action Ideas. Now we are going to narrow it down to a few ideas we can work with. Then, we will come up with our final list for the Action Forum. As we think through our ideas, focus on things we can do right here in our community. We don’t have to start with big change ideas, but instead can focus on first steps that we can take together.

Setting Priorities Process

1. Use these questions to talk about the Action Ideas:
   a. Which Action Ideas really add to our vision and address the issues and promising approaches we have been discussing?
   b. Which ideas might help people get out of poverty and stay out of it?
   c. Which ideas seem most practical or “doable?”
   d. Which ideas do we think will be most successful in our community? Why?
2. Ask the group to narrow down the list of Action Ideas by combining similar ideas.
3. Next, ask people to put a check (or sticky dot) next to their top three choices on the list of Action Ideas.
4. Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks.
5. For the remaining items, discuss these questions:
   a. What would it take to make each idea happen?
   b. What kind of support do we need to take this action? Who else might want to help?
   c. What community assets do we have available to move this idea forward?
   d. Which Action Ideas are things we can do in a year or less?
6. Then, ask people to suggest other ideas to take off the list.
7. Repeat steps 2-6, if needed, to narrow the list more.
8. Choose up to three Action Ideas to take to the Action Forum. We should select Action Ideas that are not too big or too hard to do. Write these ideas under Priority Action Ideas on the Our Community chart. They should be things we can do on our own or in groups. People from other groups will also be bringing their ideas to that meeting. Identify assets from the Community Assets chart that connect to the Priority Action Ideas. Place these on the chart titled, Our Community, under the Assets column.

Use the handout, What We Can Do, to help people think about things they can do.

Handout: What We Can Do

**PART D: Getting Ready for the Action Forum (10 minutes)**

When the Community Circles end, we will all meet at the Action Forum. Each circle will share its Priority Action Ideas. Next, we will all decide together on the Action Ideas we want to follow in our community. We will all have the opportunity to sign up to work on the Action Team that interests us the most.
Look at the handout, The Action Forum. This shows a typical plan for the Action Forum. We will need a
volunteer to speak for our group at the Action Forum. That person will share our Priority Action Ideas with the
others that attend.

Handout: The Action Forum

PART E: Wrapping Up (10 minutes)

Thank you for taking part in this Community Circle. This is our last Community Circle session, but the next
phase is very important. You are already making a difference in the community. And now we can do even more
together with the other groups. Please discuss these questions about your Community Circle:

- What has surprised you?
- Has your thinking changed about these issues? If so, how?
- How will you stay involved in addressing poverty?
- Is there anything you will do differently because of these Circles?
- Does anyone have questions about the Action Forum?

Closing

Thank people for coming to the Community Circle and for working to make a difference in the community.

If the date has been set, tell your group where and when the Action Forum will take place. Let them
know how important it is for them to come!

Gather notes and charts for this session and turn in to the Community Circles organizers.

Make sure that the Our Community Chart is clearly written because it will be posted during the Action
Forum.

Complete a session summary and attach the sign-in sheet.
Overview of Turning the Tide on Poverty and Community Circles

Many people across America want to live in communities that are vibrant and where their important goals in life can be realized. These are hopes and dreams that people have no matter where they live, whether in a rural area, a small town or city, a suburban community, or a large urban neighborhood.

People have different views of things they like or dislike about their community. But, when they discuss the problems that are holding their community back, the one issue that gets mentioned a good bit is poverty.

Poverty is pretty much everywhere. It may look different in rural places than it does in larger cities or suburbs. Poverty may be experienced in many different ways by individuals. For instance, a single parent may see poverty in terms of how many jobs it will take to earn enough to have a place to live. To elderly persons who have lived through the Great Depression, the level of poverty today may not seem all that bad. For someone who just lost a job, poverty may mean struggling to figure out how to pay the bills that are due. New arrivals to the United States may think that the local poverty in their community is nothing in comparison to what it was in their home country. For those who live in a community where almost everyone is poor, it may seem hard to imagine what life without poverty would look like. In all of these different situations, there is one thing that rings true – the challenges of poverty cut across all types of communities. The question is what can we do to turn the tide on poverty in our community?

This discussion guide will help us talk about the kind of community we want. Few places can do well if many of their residents live in poverty. When we work to reduce poverty, we take an important step in building a better community. Strong communities focus their energies on making life better for all of their residents. So, if we want to have a thriving community, it is important to build a shared vision of the type of community we want, and then to act on that vision by working hard to make life better for all people in our community.

About Community Circle

What Is a Community Circle?

Community Circles are small, diverse groups of people that meet several times to talk about an important community issue, like poverty.

The goal of Community Circles is to bring about positive change in the community. First, people look at how poverty has touched their lives. Then, they share their thoughts and beliefs about why poverty continues to exist. Next, they look at different ways to reduce poverty, including some of the pluses and minuses associated with these possible approaches. Then, people decide on the Action Ideas that they feel are the best fit for their community. Finally, they work together to take action on the best ideas they have selected.
How a Community Circle Works

A Community Circle is a step-by-step process for examining tough issues that communities are facing today. Each session of the Community Circle builds on the one before it. This guidebook is a tool to help us look at poverty in our community and to explore the right mix of approaches that can bring about positive changes in our community.

What Is a Community-Wide Circle Program?

- Many circles meet at the same time.
- 8 to 12 people are part of each circle. They come from different groups in the community.
- Groups meet together for five, two-hour sessions.
- Each group uses this guide.
- After the circles finish meeting, members of all the circle participants meet together in an Action Forum.
- The whole group decides on actions to take to help address poverty in the community.

Why Might a Community Circle Program Work for Us?

- People care. They want to make things better.
- Problems like poverty call for many solutions.
- It takes people from all parts of our community to solve problems.
- When we all join in, we all win.
- When we talk face-to-face, we get to know each other. That helps build trust.
- Working together, we can develop better ideas and plans.

Why Use Community Circles to Talk about Poverty?

Some people are already working on reducing poverty in our community. But to move ahead, more of us have to get involved. Community Circles can help people learn more about what is being done to overcome poverty. By learning about our community together, more people will see why it is so important to get involved. Community Circles can bring new life and ideas to what people are already doing. They can help make these current efforts even bigger, better and more successful. They can help uncover needs that sometimes get overlooked, or offer new ways to reduce poverty in our community.
SESSION ONE: How Are We Connected to Our Community and Poverty

- Get to know each other
- Talk about how we are connected to the issue
- Begin to look at poverty

SESSION TWO: A Vision for Our Community - What Poverty Looks Like Here

- Create a vision of a community where everybody thrives
- Talk about what poverty looks like in our community

SESSION THREE: Why Do We Have Poverty in Our Community?

- Talk about why poverty exists here

Session Four: Reaching Our Vision and Reducing Poverty

- Talk about ways to reduce poverty
- Talk about the benefits and costs of each possible approach
- Identify possible Action Ideas

Session Five: Moving to Action - Working Together to Make Good Things Happen

- Talk about assets in our community
- Talk about how to make our best Action Ideas happen
- Select our best Action Ideas to take to the Action Forum

The Action Forum

After the fifth session, we will meet with other community circles in an Action Forum. We will collect Action Ideas from all of the Community Circles. At the Action Forum, we will select the Action Ideas that the group feels will work best for our community. People can sign up to help put the action plans into motion, or to learn more about what we are planning to do.
GROUND RULES

We need to create some grounds rules to help the Community Circle work better. Read the ideas below and let the group know how you feel about them. If there are rules you would like to add, write them in.

Sample Ground Rules

- Listen to one another. Treat each other with respect.
- Give each person a chance to talk.
- Only one person should talk at a time. Please don’t cut people off.
- Speak for yourself. Avoid speaking for “your group.”
- It’s OK to disagree. If you feel hurt, say so and say why.
- Stick to the issue. No name-calling.
- If you talk about people who are not here, please don’t share their names.
- Some of what we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK.
- Help the facilitator keep things on track.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one should dominate the conversation.
THINGS YOU MIGHT FIND IN A VIBRANT COMMUNITY

Let’s imagine a vision of what we want our community to be. We need to find four or five words that best describe our hopes and dreams for building a thriving community. Look at the list below for examples.

- **Opportunity:** Everyone has an equal chance to succeed. There are local resources and opportunities for all.
- **Respect:** People treat each other fairly and have respect for each other.
- **Order:** Things run smoothly. People do what they are supposed to do.
- **Safety:** People feel secure. They are not too worried about crime or drugs. They don’t think their things will be stolen or damaged.
- **Prosperity:** The community is growing and the economy is strong. Businesses are successful, and there are plenty of jobs that pay good wages.
- **Health:** People are healthy. It is easy to get access to good health care.
- **Diversity:** There are all kinds of people in the community. They come into contact with each other often. They can all work together and help each other.
- **Spirituality:** People feel connected to something larger than themselves.
- **Cultural Openness:** People understand their culture and keep it alive in their day-to-day activities. People take pride in their heritage.
- **Caring:** People work together to help local youth, the elderly, and those who are faced with some tough challenges.

Your ideas and thoughts:
WHY DO WE HAVE POVERTY?

Here are some different views about why poverty exists.

**View #1: Bad Things Can Happen**
People can get sick or hurt. Health insurance, even when people can get it, will not always cover all the costs. Medical bills can push a person or a family into poverty. What if you lose your job or get divorced? Or what if there is a disaster, like a tornado or hurricane? When things like these happen, it can be hard to make ends meet.

**View #2: Poor Education/Poor Schools**
Children from low-income families often attend public schools that are poorly funded while wealthy families may send their children to private schools or charter schools. Without resources and quality teachers, students attending these poorer schools can’t get the education and training they need to get and keep a job. The drop-out rate is high. It is tough for these kids to compete with children who go to better schools. This means they are less likely to get into college and less likely to qualify for good paying jobs. So they end up being poor.

**View #3: Not Enough Jobs or Only Low Wage Jobs**
In some places, there just are not enough jobs. If there are jobs, they only pay low wages. People want to work, but they can’t find a job that will pay the bills. Some people hold two or more jobs, but they still cannot make enough to cover all their expenses. Lots of people who work are still in poverty. And they can’t be sure that their jobs will last. Many businesses move away and take jobs with them or just end up closing their doors. Lots of people who work are still in poverty.

**View #4: Racism**
Some people and groups have tried to keep people down because of their skin color or because they come from a different ethnic group. People of color are more likely to be in poverty. And for people of color, it may be even harder to get out of poverty. Banks, bosses, schools and real estate agents may treat people of color or from different ethnic groups unfairly. Sometimes these barriers tend to keep people in poverty.

**View #5: Content with the Status Quo**
Some people are content with things the way they are or just don’t want to rock the boat. Some people that have money think poverty doesn’t affect them so they don’t try to help make things better. Some that are in poverty don’t think anything will ever changes so they don’t try to get out of poverty.
View #6: Bad Public Policy
Some public policies can keep people from trying to stand on their own. Some programs, like TANF (Welfare) or SNAP (Food Stamps), get abused or are used in the wrong way. Some policies may be unfair to certain groups of people. Sometimes, government programs that seem like good ideas end up not working well or have bad side effects.

View #7: People Don’t Take Responsibility
Some people just don’t take personal responsibility. They don’t look hard enough for jobs or they refuse to work. They don’t use programs or resources, such as job training, or classes to complete their GED. They turn to drugs, gambling, alcohol, or crime. Some misuse credit and buy more than they can afford, which leads them to poverty.

View #8: Division by Social Class
Even though we don’t want to admit it, every community is divided by class. There are people who have money and resources and there are those who have few, if any, of these resources. In between these two groups are members of the middle class. Sometimes these class divisions make us think that we cannot work together to get anything done about poverty. And sometimes those with power and money control what happens in the community. They just look out for themselves, and take care of their friends by providing them with jobs and favors. They keep everyone else down which hurts community spirit.

View #9: Lack of a Support Network
Money is not the only thing people need to succeed in life. They need a network of people and groups that can offer other kinds of help along the way. They may need help with job training, transportation, child care, or just moral support when things are getting them down. Some need help to get over addictions or depression. Without support from family, friends, and the community, it is hard to get out of poverty.

View #10: Growing Number of Single Parent Families
More and more children are being born to single-parent families. It is hard to keep a job and care for your children when you are a single parent. Having only one paycheck makes it difficult to pay for childcare, to buy enough food for the family or to have a car to get to work. There just isn’t enough money or time to take care of everything a family needs.

Discussing the Views
These questions will help you talk about the views:

- Which views are closest to your own? (You may agree with more than one.) Why?
- Think about a view you don’t agree with. Why would someone agree with that view? Try to be open to the reasons why others would support this specific view of poverty.
- Do some of these views surprise you? Which ones and why?
- Which views seem to conflict with each other?
- What views would you like to add to our list?
- If we want to achieve Our Community Vision (from Session Two), which views are most important to work on?
- Are there any of the views we have not discussed yet? What do you think of these views?
WAYS TO REDUCE POVERTY

Using this handout, we will talk about some possible approaches to tackling poverty. Reading the supporting and opposing approaches below will help us come up with ideas for steps we can take to reduce poverty in our community. As we talk, we will think about what might work here and what might make an approach hard. If you come up with some examples of action related to these approaches, be sure to write them down. We will add those ideas to the Action Ideas chart. Use the questions below to help talk about these different approaches.

• What approaches do you like and why? Which ones are you less likely to support, and why?
• What are the strengths of each approach? What would be the challenges of using these approaches?
• How do you feel about the opposing views? Which ones do you agree with, and why? What opposing views do you disagree with, and why?
• What approaches would you like to add to the list?
• What approaches might move us closer to our vision?
• How might some of these approaches help people in our community get out of poverty?
• Who is likely to help with this approach? Who is likely to oppose it? Why?
• Who is likely to benefit from this approach? What individuals or groups may be harmed or left out if we take this approach?
• What changes will we have to make, if we want to carry out this approach?
• Which approach(es) do you think are most valuable for our community to examine further? Which Action Ideas would you like to add that would support this approach?

Approach #1: Focus on early childhood, youth, and schools

**Supporting**

More young people live in poverty than adults. When people grow up in poverty, they are more likely to stay in poverty. We need to stop this cycle. To prevent poverty later in life, we must meet our children’s basic needs. We must make sure that they have enough food, good schools, good health care, and excellent adult role models.

**Opposing**

The responsibility of raising kids and preparing them for the adult world should fall on the family, not government or the community. Besides, investing in young people is a waste of money since most will leave the community once they graduate. If we are going to invest anywhere, we need to start with the adults, not the children. One of the best predictors of a child’s success in school is the parent’s success.

**Your Thoughts**
Approach #2: Create more and better jobs

Supporting: We need to support local businesses and create new ones. We should get rid of unfair taxes and rules that tend to hurt businesses. We need to create more jobs that pay enough so people can take care of themselves and their families. Everyone benefits when people are working and are getting paid a decent wage.

Opposing: It is not easy to create jobs. It is expensive and time consuming especially when you consider that many business developers seem to shy away from communities that have a high level of poverty. Sometimes banks won’t make loans to start new businesses in poor communities. Even if the jobs were created, we would still have to make sure people were trained for the jobs.

Approach #3: Help people meet basic needs

Supporting: We need to make sure everyone has their basic needs met. No one should go hungry. Everyone should have a safe place to sleep. Everyone needs basic services. If there are more services for people who need them, we all will be better off.

Opposing: Many programs already help people with basic needs such as food and shelter. Too many people are looking to these programs and to government hand-outs. We need to reduce the number of people who depend on outside help to meet their basic needs. In order to make real change, we need to focus on helping people help themselves through job training, money management, or other skills that will help them stand on their own.
Approach #4: Improve race relations

Racism hurts everyone and keeps some people in poverty. It affects jobs, loans, housing, arrests, and schooling. African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and others face racism and unfairness every day. We must address the practice of racism by people and by institutions. We must work to create racial equity in our community.

We have been looking at society through the lens of race far too long. We must stop blaming our problems on race. Today, everyone has the chance to succeed. Minorities who are qualified and willing to work hard can get a fair chance to succeed. Racism is a terrible fact of our history, but it does not determine the actions or beliefs of many people today. It holds back everyone if we continue to act as though it does.

Approach #5: Invest in critical community services and resources

Many communities lack essential services and resources. It is important for communities to have decent health care, safe roads and bridges, dependable transportation services, good schools, and up-to-date technology (such as access to the Internet and cell phone services). All of these things are needed for a community to attract and keep good businesses. If we develop these resources, our quality of life will improve. We will be able to attract more people and businesses because they want to move to a good and active community.

It costs a lot to develop resources and services in a community. Many small communities cannot afford to develop or maintain these services. And even if the resources are there, it doesn’t mean that people will use them, or that new businesses will come to our community just because these services are available to them.
OTHER APPROACHES

Use this space to write other approaches your community should consider. Think of the supporting and opposing views and how you’ve seen it implemented in other communities.
WHAT WE CAN DO

Poverty is a big problem. There are many ways to begin. Different people and groups can work together. One person can take action. In some cases, the whole community or government should take the lead. All of these steps can fit together to create change.

Think about some of the Action Ideas we have talked about so far. Where do they fit in here?

On our own, we can...

- Help people directly.
- Notice that some people seem OK on the outside but are not really getting by.
- Buy from local businesses.
- Write letters to the editor or town council.
- Learn more about poverty and talk to others.
- Offer jobs that pay enough to live on.
- What else?

With our neighbors, or in small groups, we can...

- Mentor young people.
- Remember we all have something to offer.
- Call for affordable housing.
- Donate food to the food pantry.
- Help someone who needs child care.
- Volunteer to build or repair homes.
- Talk together about what we think should be done.
- Plant community gardens for food and beauty.
- Pair adult mentors with children at risk of poverty.
- What else?

As a community, or with government, we can...

- Get the state to support local credit unions.
- Work to stop abuse of drugs and alcohol.
- Teach youth how to budget and how to handle money.
- Work to make sure that new businesses provide decent wages and benefits for employees.
- Hold an event that shows our area is a good place to do business.
- Provide shelter for the homeless.
- Start a “neighborhood watch” program.
- Make sure people get services they need. Help people pay fuel bills.
- Work to preserve or expand programs for the poor.
- Help people fill out tax forms.
- Stop unfair lending.
- What else?
THE ACTION FORUM

Community Circles lead to action and change in many ways. One way to do this is through an Action Forum. This is a large group meeting at the end of a round of Circles. Action Ideas from all the Community Circles are presented at the Action Forum. There are usually several Action Ideas that many people support.

To move these ideas forward, people form Action Teams. Some people may join these Action Teams. Some may choose to help in other ways. In Community Circle programs that continue over time, more and more people get involved, and many good things happen in the community.

A Sample Action Forum Agenda (1 to 3 hours)

1. Social Time: Refreshments, Entertainment, Gallery Walk
   People time to read summaries from each circle’s Our Community charts created in Session Five that are posted around the room.

2. Welcome and Introductions — A moderator will:
   a. Welcome everyone and introduce sponsors.
   b. Review agenda.
   c. Talk about the Community Circle effort in the community.
   d. Thank facilitators and other key volunteers.

3. Reports from the Community Circles
   A representative from each circle speaks for a few minutes. This person summarizes Action Ideas and related Assets selected by the person’s Community Circle (Our Community chart from Session Five).

4. Moving to Action
   a. Moderator helps identify the most common themes for Action Ideas from all circles, and invites participants to sign up for an Action Team.
   b. People sign up for Action Teams.
   c. The leader for each Action Team collects names and sets a date for the first meeting.

5. Closing remarks
   a. Describe how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing.
   b. Describe plans for another round of Community Circles, celebration, or check-in meeting.
   c. Thank all participants.
Please submit within one week of each session.

Session Date:          Session Location:
Facilitators:         Session Covered:

What suggestions do you have regarding the material used in this session?

What went well?

What needs improvement?

What were a few key points discussed during this session?

What were areas of agreement?

What were areas of disagreement?

What challenges did the circle experience?

How do you think the facilitation is going?

What points/issues need to be reviewed in the next session.

What are the plans for the next session? (Dates, material to cover, handouts & amounts needed, homework to consider, etc.)
How to Use an Information Sheet

Many Community Circle programs develop Information Sheets to use along with their discussion guides. An Information Sheet should provide objective information about how the issue is playing out in your community. It can cover a range of information, from general to specific.

A good information sheet paints a picture of the community and the issue. It provides basic facts and a framework for the discussion. It should include:

1. Facts that describe the community as a whole.
2. Facts that illustrate the situation or issue under discussion.
3. Information about what is already being done in the community to address the issue.

Get a few people together to think about what kind of information should be in your fact sheet. Be sure this group is diverse and represents many points of view. Don’t forget to include senior citizens and young people in this process.

Keep the information simple, clear, easy to understand, and brief — two or three pages, at most. Provide enough facts to frame the discussion, but don’t overwhelm people. Be sure the information is balanced and objective and relates directly to the issue. Don’t use too many words. Simple graphics, such as pie charts or bar graphs, are a good way to get complex information across. You can also use newspaper articles or official documents. Always say where you got the information.

Try to include more than just economic data. It is easy to find economic data. It is harder to find information that tells the real story. Poverty can be about more than money. There are other resources that people need. Some of this will take detective work in the community. Don’t be discouraged if it is hard to find some of the information, or if you have to piece it together. Just try to create a very broad picture.

Examples of what you might include in an information sheet:

- **Demographics** – Census data on age, gender, race, and ethnicity for the community and the county, including numbers from past years to show how things are changing.
- **Employment** – Information on employment and job trends in the area.
- **Economic Conditions** – Which industries are doing well and which ones are struggling. The number of small businesses and self-employed persons in the community.
- **Income and Poverty** – The average or median income of local households, how many individuals, families, and children are living below the poverty line, how much is spent on the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and other important family assistance programs.
- **Health** – Birth and death rates for the area. Information on rates of obesity and major health conditions. Teen pregnancy rates.
FACILITATOR TOOLS

- **Children** – Information on school attendance. Information on children receiving free and/or reduced lunches at school.
- **Adult/Family** – Percentage of family and single parent headed households and adults that live alone compared to the national figures.
- **Education** – Educational attainment of adults 25 years of age and above. The high school graduation rate and how it compares to other communities; number of kids going to college after high school.

This is not the only way to create an Information Sheet. There are many kinds of information. You may want to include some of these ideas. You may also want to add to this list, or choose other information. You may also want to make charts or graphs to show some of the information. This will make it easier to see and understand.

Here are a few sites on the Internet that can provide more information on poverty in communities. Also, look at For More Information on page 52.

- Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center: [http://datacenter.kidscou...](http://datacenter.kidscount.org/)
- Children’s Defense Fund: [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)
- Community Data Center [http://srdc.msstate.edu/datacenter](http://srdc.msstate.edu/datacenter)
- Kaiser State Health Facts: [www.statehealthfacts.org/](http://www.statehealthfacts.org/)
- U.S. Census Bureau: [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)
  - Community profiles: [http://factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov)

After you have collected all of your information and you are ready to put your Information Sheet together, ask: “What is really essential to the discussion?” Resist the temptation to include everything.
Tips for Facilitators

A Community Circle facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. But the facilitator should be the person best prepared for the discussion. This means understanding the purpose of the Circle and asking questions to help the group consider the subject.

Be prepared.

- Review all discussion materials before the session.
- Prepare the room, charts, and other materials.
- Think about how the discussion might go.
- Arrive early to welcome participants.

Stay neutral!

The most important thing to remember is that, as a facilitator, you should not share your personal views or try to push your own agenda on the issue. You are there to serve the discussion, not to join it.

Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

Explain the purpose of the Community Circle and help the group set ground rules.

At the beginning of the Community Circle, remind everyone that the purpose of the Community Circle is to work with one another to look at the issue in a democratic way. Also remind them that your role is to remain neutral, keep the discussion focused, and guide the conversation according to the ground rules. Start with the basic ground rules listed in Session One. Then ask participants to add their own ideas. Start each session by reviewing the ground rules.

Assist the group process.

- Help the group stay focused on the subject. (Your main role)
- Make sure everyone gets a fair hearing. Keep track of who has spoken, who has not spoken, and who needs more time to make a point.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups. This will help put people at ease.
- Only interfere with the discussion if you have to. Don’t allow the group to turn to you for answers.
- Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let participants respond directly to each other.
- Always be thinking about how to move the discussion forward.
- Once in a while, ask participants to sum up the most important points that have come out in the discussion.
FACILITATOR TOOLS

- Remember that some people are uncomfortable reading out loud. Don’t go “around the circle” reading passages. Instead, ask for volunteers or be prepared to read pages yourself.
- Don’t be afraid of silence! People sometimes need time to think before they respond. Try counting silently to ten before you rephrase the question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- Don’t let anyone take over the conversation; try to involve everyone.
- Remember that a Community Circle is not a debate. It is a group dialogue. If participants forget this, don’t hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the ground rules.
- Keep track of time!

Help the group look at various points of view.

- Make it clear to participants that you will never take sides on the issue; your role as a facilitator is to be fair and act neutral.
- Use the discussion guide to help participants consider a wide range of views. You might ask participants to consider a point of view that hasn’t come up in the discussion. Ask the group to think about the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem.
- Ask participants to think about the concerns and values that are behind their beliefs.
- Help participants identify common ground, but don’t try to force agreement.

Ask open-ended questions that don’t lead to easy answers.

Open-ended questions are questions that can’t be answered with a quick “yes” or “no.” They encourage people to think about why they believe what they do. Open-ended questions also encourage people to look for connections between different ideas. Get familiar with the following questions. They are a great resource during any Community Circle.

General questions:

- What seems to be the key point here? Do you agree with that? Why?
- What do other people think of this idea?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- What experiences with this can you share with the group?
- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?
- How might others see this issue?
- Do you think others in the group see this the way you do? Why?
- How does this make you feel?
Questions to use when there is disagreement:

- What do you think s/he is saying?
- What bothers you most about this?
- What is at the heart of the disagreement?
- How does this make you feel?
- What experiences or beliefs might lead a reasonable person to support that point of view?
- What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
- What is blocking the discussion?
- What might you be willing to give up in order to come to some agreement?
- What don’t you agree with?
- What do you find most convincing about that point of view?
- What is it about that position that you just cannot live with?
- Could you say more about what you think?
- What makes this so hard?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?

Questions to use when people are feeling hopeless:

- Say a little about how that makes you feel.
- Who are some people or groups that care about this?
- What are some small steps that would make this better.
Working with Multicultural Differences

Be aware of the ways that cultural differences show up when people from different cultures interact:

• Communication styles

• Verbal communication:
  • Shades of meaning differ (even in the same language) from one culture to another.
  • Volume: shouting may mean a person is excited, not angry.

• Non-verbal communication:
  • Facial expressions and body language
  • Personal space (seating arrangements matter!)
  • Sense of time
  • Touching

• Attitudes toward conflict:
  • In some cultures, people deal with conflict directly.
  • In other cultures, face-to-face conflict is embarrassing, and people prefer to work things out quietly, perhaps in writing.

• Approaches to completing tasks:
  • People have different notions about time and relationship building.
  • In some cultures, more value is placed on getting down to work first, and building relationships along the way.
  • Other cultures start by building relationships. Then people are ready to work together to complete the task.

• Decision-making styles:
  • In some cultures, managers delegate responsibility for decision making to an assistant.
  • In some cultures, people value being able to make decisions themselves.
  • Sometimes, group decisions are made by majority rule.
  • Sometimes, groups make decisions by consensus.

• Approaches to “knowing:”
  • People in some cultures learn by measuring, and counting — quantifying things.
  • In other cultures, “knowing” comes from experience and intuitive reasoning.
Helping multicultural groups function well:

- Make people feel welcome. At the beginning, give participants time to share information about their culture.
- Ask them to bring something to the Community Circle that helps people learn about their culture. It could be a picture, a drawing, an object, a poem, food, music, or anything else.
- Ask people to tell the story of their name.
- Give each person an equal amount of time.
- Think about how your own culture and communication style are affecting the conversation.
- You may need to ask questions in a different way.
- Set a tone of unity. Help people see their similarities as well as their differences.
- Help people understand that there is no one “right way” to communicate.
  - Help group members appreciate different communication styles.
  - Talk together about things like body language and personal space, about traditions of listening, and speaking out.
- Avoid stereotyping. Cultural norms don’t apply to all the individuals within a culture.
- Help the group understand that no one can represent his or her entire culture.
- Try to build empathy and understanding among group members, but remind them that no one can know exactly how it feels to be in someone else’s shoes.
- After a couple of sessions, ask participants how culture affects the way they view the exercises and ideas that come up in the discussion.
- After the group develops a list of options for action, ask about the role of culture and race in developing and carrying out the options.

Working with interpreters:

- Remind interpreters that their job is to translate accurately, not to add their own opinions.
- Give interpreters written materials ahead of time, and go over the process with them.
- Make sure the interpreter feels comfortable letting the facilitator know if he/she needs more time.
- Speak in short sentences and keep ideas simple. This gives the interpreter time to catch up.
- Pay attention to the interpreter. Even if you don’t speak the language, you can tell if he/she is translating everything, or not.
- After every session, ask interpreters to translate notes that were posted on newsprint.
- Speak to the participants not the interpreter.

Working with Multicultural Differences
Working with Groups where Literacy Is a Concern

- At the start, give a simple explanation of how the Community Circle will work, and tell participants the goal of each session. Each time you meet, restate the goal of the session.

- If the people in your group can’t read, or have trouble reading, limit your use of the flip charts.

- If participants are required to fill out forms, assign someone to ask the questions and fill out the forms with/for them.

- Be prepared to read aloud to the group if participants are uncomfortable doing that. Ask people to rephrase or summarize to make sure everyone understands.

- Avoid using jargon or acronyms. When these terms come up and people look puzzled, ask: “What does that mean?”

- In between sessions, check with participants to make sure they know that what they have shared is very important to the group.

- Give people extra time to collect their thoughts before they talk. Remember, this may be the first time they have spoken in public, and/or in a different language.

- Consider putting people in small groups, but don’t separate people by language groups. You may need more than one interpreter per circle.
Note Taking Tips

Every Community Circle needs a recorder, someone to take notes. This person’s job is to listen carefully, keep track of the big ideas that come up in the Community Circle, and list them on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them.

- If there are two facilitators for your group, they can take turns recording.
- If a volunteer takes notes, make sure it is not the same person each session. The recorder may find it hard to take part in the discussion.

Note taking serves many purposes:

- It helps group members stay on track and move the discussion along.
- It provides a way to capture the wisdom and common themes that develop in the discussion.
- Notes from all the Community Circles in your program can be turned into a report that summarizes what you have done.

How to take notes:

- Capture big ideas and themes, not every word.
- Use the words of the speaker as closely as possible.
- Check with the group to make sure your notes are correct.
- Use the charts from the sessions to capture these ideas. Be sure to bring these charts to every session:
  - Action Ideas
  - Things We Are Already Doing
  - Important Ideas - use this page to capture any other big ideas that surface from the group. It can also help if groups seem to be distracted by some issue that is off subject. The recorder can capture the issue on the chart for later discussion to help the group return focus to the questions in the process.
- Write important ideas neatly so everyone can read the notes.
- After each session, share the notes with the Community Circle organizers so they can follow your progress.
- Make sure that people are talking to each other, not to the recorder.
- Limit writing to main ideas and actions to keep from distracting the group.
- VERY IMPORTANT: Save the notes so that you can refer to them in later sessions.
For More Information

This guide is meant to help communities begin to take action. In your Community Circles, you created a community vision, talked about why poverty exists in your community and what it looks like, and discussed approaches to reducing poverty. Here is information about organizations and resources that can tell you more about poverty and help you take action.

Resources to learn more about poverty and to take action:

- Annie E. Casey Foundation: [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Seeks to restore the strong connections between vulnerable families and the circumstances vital to building stronger families and more supportive neighborhoods.
- The Brookings Institution: [www.brook.edu](http://www.brook.edu). Focuses on independent research and innovative policy solutions.
- Carsey Institute, a research institute at the University of New Hampshire: [www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu](http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu). Supports policy research that informs policy makers and practitioners engaged in increasing opportunities for social mobility, and building healthy, sustainable communities.
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org). Works at federal and state levels on fiscal policy and public programs that affect low and moderate income families and individuals. Conducts research and analysis to inform public debates over proposed budget and tax policies, and to help ensure that the needs of low-income families and individuals are considered in these debates.
- The Heartland Center for Leadership Development: [www.heartlandcenter.info](http://www.heartlandcenter.info). Focuses on leadership training, citizen participation, community planning, facilitation, evaluation, and curriculum development. Its programs and publications stress the critical role played by local leadership, as communities and organizations build capacity for sustainable development.
- Kirwan Institute for the Community of Race and Ethnicity: [www.kirwaninstitute.org](http://www.kirwaninstitute.org). Seeks to deepen understanding of the causes of and solutions to racial and ethnic disparities and hierarchies. Focuses explicitly on Ohio and the United States, but also on the Americas as a whole, and on the larger global community.
- MDRC, a nonprofit social policy research organization focusing on low-income issues: [www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org). Seeks to learn what works in social policy and to affect the design and implementation of policies and programs in five main areas: family well-being and child development, public education, transitions to adulthood, low-wage workers and communities, and barriers to employment.
FACILITATOR TOOLS

- National Center of the Area Poverty Research Centers Program (University of Michigan): www.npc.umich.edu. Conducts and promotes multidisciplinary, policy-relevant research on the causes and consequences of poverty. Also provides mentoring and training to young scholars.
- Project Money: www.projectmoney.org. Works with people to help them achieve their financial goals and learn how to deal with their money. Project Money is also hosted by Project Read at the San Francisco Public Library.
- Public Agenda: www.publicagenda.org/. Public Agenda stimulates meaningful public debate with its “Choicework” discussion guides, which present three or four different points of view about how to address a particular issue. Public Agenda does not advocate one approach over another, but seeks to clarify alternatives and promote discussion on issues.
- The Rural School and Community Trust: www.ruraledu.org. Involves young people in learning linked to their communities, improves the quality of teaching and school leadership, and advocates for appropriate state educational policies, including the key issue of equitable and adequate funding for rural schools.
- Southern Rural Development Center: www.srdc.msstate.edu. The Southern Rural Development Center seeks to strengthen the capacity of the region’s 29 land-grant institutions to address critical contemporary rural development issues impacting the well-being of people and communities in the rural South.
For Further Reading

- DeParle, Jason. *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation’s Drive to End Welfare*. DeParle follows three women in one extended family and traces their story back six generations to a common ancestor — a Mississippi slave — and adds politicians, case workers, reformers, and rogues to an epic exploration of America’s struggle with poverty and dependency. This book offers a highly complex response to the welfare debate and illuminates the economic landscape.

- Duncan, Cynthia M. *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*. Duncan, professor of sociology, researches rural poverty in America. This book is the result of a five-year Community of how the poverty cycle can be broken.

- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. Millions of Americans work for poverty-level wages, and one day Ehrenreich decided to join them. This book reveals low-wage America in all its tenacity, anxiety, and surprising generosity — a land of Big Boxes, fast food, and a thousand desperate strategies for survival.

- Hartman, Chester (ed.). *Double Exposure: Poverty & Race in America*. This book focuses on our country’s most troublesome and seemingly intractable social problem: the intersection of race and poverty. Hartman provides an up-to-date and comprehensive review of the major topics surrounding this issue: affirmative action, the permanence of racism thesis, the use and utility of racial and ethnic categories, multiculturalism, immigration, the underclass debate, and democracy/equality. Sixty-three contributions (by some of the nation’s leading thinkers and activists) pose key questions and offer a range of progressive responses.

- Iceland, John. *Poverty in America: A Handbook*. In an in-depth look at trends, patterns, and causes of poverty in the United States, Iceland combines the latest statistical information, historical data, and social scientific theory to provide a comprehensive picture of poverty in America — a picture that shows how poverty is measured and understood and how this has changed over time, as well as how public policies have grappled with poverty as a political issue and an economic reality.

- Payne, Ruby K. *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Framework illuminates differences between generational poverty and situational poverty, presents the issues central to teaching students from poverty, and offers proven tools educators can use immediately to improve the quality of instruction in their classrooms.

- Schiller, Bradley R. *The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination*, Ninth Edition. A leading classroom authority on the causes of poverty and antipoverty options. The ninth edition has been thoroughly updated with new data, policy initiatives, research findings, and new issues.

- Shipler, David K. *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*. Shipler, a journalist, observed some impoverished working Americans and their families, for a number of years. His research reveals the interlocking problems that challenge the climb out of poverty.
Books That Communities Have Found Useful

Many communities are already working on reducing poverty. We asked some of them to suggest resources and information that they have found useful. Here is a list of resources that many of them recommend:

- Baum, Howell S. *The Organization of Hope: Communities Planning Themselves*. (State University of New York Press)
- Smith, Terie Dreussie, Payne, Ruby K. and DeVol, Philip E. *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*. (aha! Process, Inc.)
- Duncan, Cynthia M. *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*. (Yale University Press)
- Heartland Center. *Better Schools through Public Engagement*. (Heartland Center)
- Kretzmann, John P. and McKnight, John L. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets*. (ACTA Publications)
- Luther, Vicki and Wall, Milan. *Clues to Rural Community Survival*. (Heartland Center)
- Luther, Vicki and Wall, Milan. *Clues to Rural Community Survival Workbook*. (Heartland Center)
- Payne, Ruby K. *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. (aha! Process, Inc.)
- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (Simon & Schuster, Inc.)
- Shipler, David K. *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*. (Knopf)
Our Reviewers:

The Southern Rural Development Center wishes to express thanks to the team of reviewers that provided key insights into the development of this final document. An initial team of reviewers offered suggestions on where the original Thriving Communities document authored by Everyday Democracy may need an added “southern flavor.” Initial reviewers included Keydron Guinn (Southern University), LaVonya Malveaux (Southern University), and Tim Slack (Louisiana State University). A second wave of reviewers helped tweak the final *Turning the Tide on Poverty* guide. These colleagues include Molly Barrett (Everyday Democracy), Sally Campbell (Everyday Democracy), and Alice Diebel (The Kettering Foundation). Finally, Extension Educators and community participants from the eight pilot sites provided valuable insights into this product. The pilot sites were Alabama - Dallas and Perry Counties; Georgia - Elbert County; Louisiana - St. Landry and Tensas Parishes; Mississippi - Lauderdale and Neshoba Counties; and Oklahoma - Okfuskee County.

Our Partners:

Everyday Democracy

Everyday Democracy (formerly the Study Circles Resource Center) is a national organization that explores ways to help all kinds of people think, talk and work together to solve problems. They work with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions, and states, helping these groups pay particular attention to how racism and ethnic differences affect the problems they address. Everyday Democracy was created as the Study Circles Resource Center in 1989 by The Paul J. Aicher Foundation, a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization. Since 1989, Everyday Democracy has worked with more than 600 communities across the United States on many different public issues. [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)

Farm Foundation

Farm Foundation, NFP is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization focused on economic and policy issues impacting agriculture, the food system and rural regions. The Foundation functions as a catalyst, using conferences, workshops and other activities to bring the best information available into dialogue on important economic and public policy issues. The Foundation therefore, does not lobby or advocate specific policy options. Its 76-year reputation for objectivity allows it to bring together diverse groups from across the food-chain—producers, private agribusiness leaders, representatives of non-governmental agencies, academics and government agency representatives—for meaningful discussions. [www.farmfoundation.org](http://www.farmfoundation.org)

The Kettering Foundation

The Kettering Foundation is an independent, nonpartisan research organization rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Everything Kettering researches relates to one central question: what does it take for democracy to work as it should? Or put another way: What does it take for citizens to shape their collective future? The Foundation explores ways that key political practices can be strengthened through innovations that emphasize active roles for citizens. Kettering’s research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people collectively can do to address problems affecting their lives, their community, and their nation. [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org)
ABOUT THE SOUTHERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

The Southern Rural Development Center seeks to strengthen the capacity of the region’s 29 land-grant institutions to address critical contemporary rural development issues impacting the well-being of people and communities in the rural South. The overarching goals of the Center are to:

- Stimulate the formation of multi-state research teams.
- Coordinate the development and revision of educational materials and maintain a centralized repository of educational resources.
- Organize and deliver high priority rural development research and educational workshops/conferences.
- Provide leadership for the preparation of science-based rural development policy reports.
- Build partnerships that link the South’s land-grant university system with other key entities committed to rural development activities in the region.