



# BLUEPRINTS

CREATING SOLUTIONS FROM WITHIN

FOR CHANGE

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# Creating Solutions from Within: Blueprints For Change

No matter where I go, I hear one consistent message from people who are working to eradicate poverty barriers: It's the system! This "Blueprints for Change" template can empower you and your organization to address systemic barriers. Each community has its own strengths and assets to call upon for this system-changing work. Research on organizational development has shown that sustainable change must come from within and must be grounded in the community's vision and leadership capacity (Schein, 1992; Fullan, 2001). An outside consultant can raise awareness and provide education, but real solutions come from within. There is no silver bullet or magic quick-fix to make an organization responsive and successful in addressing poverty barriers. Rather, it is a careful, well thought-out evolutionary process (as outlined below) that can lead your organization towards poverty competency. Read each stage below and reflect on how you would rate your organization.



## ***Maintaining a Mono-Economic Experience***

*At this stage, an organization exhibits the following characteristics:*

- Members of the organization act like all families are from the same poverty experience (generational, working class, immigrant, or situational).
- Expectation from "Experts" expect families to conform to the behavior and communication styles of the middle-class.
- Information services are received only by complying with middle-class rules and norms.
- All families are expected to "act" middle-class (be on time, have correct paperwork, participate and so on).
- Differences in resources, priorities, culture, economic opportunity, literacy and life experiences are downplayed.
- A belief exists that all people have the same chance in life.

## ***Creating a Non-Discriminatory Organizational Culture***

*As an organization begins taking steps to change, it will exhibit the following characteristics:*

- Attention is paid to removing cultural or economic-related roadblocks that inhibit families from receiving services in ways that are helpful and meaningful.
- An organizational goal is to increase methods of communicating and serving people in poverty situations.
- Poverty-related awareness and communication training is usually offered.
- Members of the organization compromise to the needs of those with different cultural or economic backgrounds and resources.

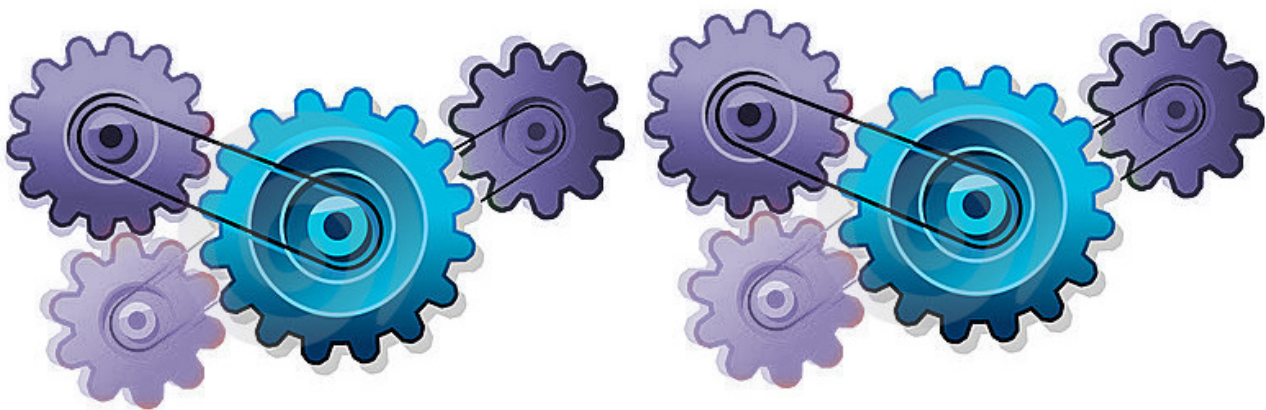


## Developing Poverty Competency

*This is the target organizational culture for addressing poverty issues. At this stage, an organization has these characteristics:*

- Recognition and valuing of differences, preferences, backgrounds, opportunities; values exist.
- Knowledge that the “expert” model does not work.
- Staff members have knowledge and skills and recognize people fighting poverty also have knowledge and skills. The coaching model is used to assist people in navigating their system, including presenting information in multiple formats and providing one-on-one coaching.
- Staff “walk the talk” of collaboration. They are familiar with local poverty-fighting organizations as well as organizations that can provide opportunities to people living in the crisis of poverty. A conscious effort is made to link people to resources and opportunities.
- Staff is conscious about how different experiences, perceptions and communication styles affect priorities and relationships. Perspectives and goals of people living in poverty are heard before sharing possible solutions.
- Staff is aware of their own perceptions about difference and are able to suspend judgment of behavior, attitude, and styles that may not match their own.
- New organizational norms are created that allow for more leeway for families to participate in ways that make the most sense to them.
- Organizational policies and procedures are flexible enough to work for everyone, not just those with economic privilege.
- Poverty competency issues and barriers to information and services are openly discussed in meetings and within the organization.
- Staff members spend time sharing “what worked and what could have been better” for assisting people to break down poverty-related barriers.

This organizational change process is based on inquiry where small groups determine areas to focus on, learn about poverty, study examples of how others have responded with positive results, and generate their own goals, strategies, and solutions. The proposed solutions are continually tested, modified, refined and replaced as needed.



## Reflection

- As you consider your own organization, which of these stages of organizational approaches best captures your organization's current reality?
- Consider perceptions of those within your organization. How do individuals within your organization rate policy and practices to address poverty?
- Have community partners and members of the organization rate how they interact with people in poverty. This can be done by asking partners what they see the your organization does well in breaking poverty barriers and what might be improved upon.
- One individual will struggle to increase poverty competency and create organizational change. Helping your organization to authentically address poverty barriers takes the commitment of many. What level of commitment currently exists in your organization to make a change?

## Preparing For Change

*“The first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn”. –Gloria Steinem*

***Individuals within organizations undergoing change must first recognize the core knowledge for building a culture that is responsive to poverty conditions and to the people who live in poverty. This core includes:***

- Historical perspectives on poverty in the United States and the current conditions of people in poverty.
- Key concepts for understanding our own attitudes and beliefs as well as understanding the context of generational poverty (perception, membership, motivation, identification, and empathy).
- A recognition that motivating people in poverty requires knowing them on a personal level and knowing what is going on in their lives and what is most important to them.
- How communication and learning styles are impacted by poverty conditions (oral and print culture styles of learning, communicating, and relating).
- Familiarity with the theories of: Resiliency, Strengths Perspective, Assets, and Social Capital. Applying these theories provides a foundation for creating authentic opportunity and addressing barriers related to poverty.
- Importance of flexibility and comprehensiveness in any approach to addressing the needs of people in poverty. Design your system to serve people and remove access barriers and policies that punish people for their poverty conditions.
- An awareness of individual poverty competencies in your organization. Who has experienced poverty? What kind of poverty? Use authentic voices to assist in examining policies, programs and actions. Be tuned into judgmental behavior toward people living in poverty and work to build understanding and empathy. Provide on-going education on poverty and its impacts on people.

***As you develop this core knowledge, examine the values, biases and assumptions in the organization that are related to people in generational poverty:***

- How do we interpret the behavior of people in poverty?
- What misperceptions do we hold as we try to understand the behavior, actions, and reactions of people in poverty?
- Where do we assign the “blame” for failure?

***Next, consider the current vision and goal of your organization:***

- Is moving people out of poverty part of your organizational goals?
- Does your organizational vision empower and embrace people who live in the crisis of poverty?

***Finally, determine the level of staff commitment and their readiness to engage in the change process:***

- Does your staff feel the need for organizational growth to better fight poverty?
- Is your staff aware of the challenges and possibilities of serving people in poverty?
- Does the staff understand the potential challenges and successes that will come with embarking on the change process?
- Are moving people out of poverty tied to performance reviews?



## Action Planning Process and On-Going Evaluation

The evaluation and action planning stage are designed for integration into the organizational plans for improvement. The process is composed of three phases that are repeated as needed. The goal is to first create a current snapshot of what is working well, then customize strategies for improving success for individuals living in poverty conditions in your community who are served by your organization while continuously evaluating the process and its success. The three phases are:

1. **Capturing Your Organization's Current Reality: Poverty Competency Assessment**
2. **Data Interpretation and Presentation**
3. **Finalizing the Action Plan**

In each phase, you will use specific tools and strategies designed to reveal your organization's culture related to poverty issues. The data gathered and analyzed at one phase are built on and inform subsequent phases. Let's take a look.

### Phase 1: CAPTURING THE CURRENT REALITY

This phase focuses on the competency in your organization for serving individuals living in poverty conditions. It examines what your community is doing that is working well and identifies areas for growth. This process is similar to other needs assessment processes; however, the focus in the poverty competency examination is to look exclusively at the environment from the perspective of those living in poverty. This is an **information-gathering phase** using surveys, focus groups and interviews. The following are assessed in this first phase:

- Existing policies and practices, e.g. spoken and unspoken/sacred cows
- Staff and leadership competencies, including individual attitudes, beliefs, skills, and values regarding children and families living in poverty
- Existing capacity of the organization to reduce/overcome poverty related barriers (what's working)
- Capacity of community partnerships and/or parent involvement to support organizational efforts to reduce poverty effects

Also in this phase, the organization forms the **Poverty Competency Advisory Team**. This is a group made up of staff/leadership, parents, and community stakeholders.

This team meets regularly to provide guidance and assist with assessment and the implementation of the action plan (Phase Three).

### Outcomes for this Phase:

- Baseline data in the words of your staff, those whom you serve, and your partners; it should reflect your organization's strengths regarding serving/working with individuals who are living in poverty conditions.
- Areas for improvement identified where individuals are falling through the cracks. This information serves as a tool for planning and measuring progress.
- The formation of the Poverty Competency Advisory Team.
- All staff (including advisory team members) participate in poverty training.





# Activity

## Poverty Competency Assessment

Below are critical areas to address for improving opportunities for people from poverty. Use the questions on the following page to help define each of the critical areas. Then check the box on the right that best fits the current reality of your organization. An area is **Emerging** if there is awareness about the issue surrounding it and you have begun thinking about the issue. An area is **Developing** if there is awareness and some attempts are being made to develop an action plan. An area is **Proficient** if there is awareness, measurable goals, relevant action plans, and documented evidence things are working well (people are seeing a difference!). An area is **Distinguished** if there is awareness of the issues, action plans are consistently effective, and you have the ability and willingness to share your experiences/your model with others. Action plans should include aspects for addressing each of these areas.

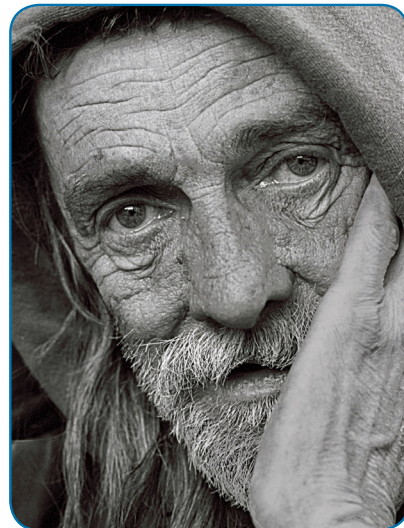
|   | Emerging | Developing | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|----------|------------|------------|---------------|
| 1. Education and Self-Awareness About Poverty and Its Causes                        |          |            |            |               |
| 2. Organizational Policies and Procedures that are Responsive to Poverty Conditions |          |            |            |               |
| 3. Partnerships & Resources   |          |            |            |               |
| 4. Staff Buy-In   |          |            |            |               |
| 5. Collaborative Relationships  |          |            |            |               |
| 6. Effective Communication Skills (Oral culture training)                           |          |            |            |               |
| 7. All Staff as Mentors   |          |            |            |               |
| 8. Building Resiliency and Positive Self-Concept                                    |          |            |            |               |
| 9. Exposure Opportunities   |          |            |            |               |
| 10. Maintaining Motivation/ Building Value of Education/ Planning for the Future    |          |            |            |               |
| 11. Welcoming Families/Reaching out to the Community                                |          |            |            |               |

See the questions on the following page to help define your current poverty competency indicators.



# Questions to ponder as you fill out the Poverty Competency Assessment

1. **Education and Self-Awareness About Poverty and Its Causes:** Is the history of poverty taught in your organization? Are staff members trained on poverty competencies necessary for serving those living in the context of poverty? Are poverty issues included as a topic of conversation at all staff meetings?
2. **Assess Organizational Policies and Procedures:** Have you examined your organization's policies and procedures through the lens of poverty to see if they are serving those living in poverty conditions? Are they responsive to poverty conditions?
3. **Partnerships and Resources:** Does your organization have enough community partnerships to provide a comprehensive approach to addressing barriers related to poverty (clothes, supplies, utilities, housing, food, jobs, legal help)? Do staff members know the neighborhoods/community where those from poverty live (i.e. are there sidewalks, what kinds of businesses are in their area, how are they treated in their community, what is available to them in their community?).
4. **Staff Buy-In:** Do you have staff buy-in for increasing the success of individuals living in poverty? Do you have a shared vision and clearly stated goals on how your organization will serve people in poverty?
5. **Collaborative Relationships:** Have you begun to develop a collaborative program? Does your organization have professional development teams who discuss and share best practices for serving people in poverty? Do you help individuals form peer helping relationships (i.e. student-to-student, parent-to-parent)?
6. **Effective Communication Skills (oral culture training):** Does your organization have a program to address vocabulary/grammar/oral culture language differences and help individuals gain the middle class vocabulary and the skills of print culture while honoring and learning from the wealth of skills people from oral culture bring?
7. **All Staff as Mentors:** Are staff in your organization able to act as mentors (as defined by Levine, Nidiffer, and Beegle)? Do they believe in the person, do they believe that there is a way out of poverty, are they aware of the history of poverty and local poverty conditions, and do they introduce those they are mentoring to people within their network? Do individuals identify with staff (e.g. Do they see how they are like them and do staff see how they are like those from poverty?). Do staff members self-disclose personal stories and/or examples of how they learned/how they created success for themselves?
8. **Building Resiliency and Positive Self-Concept:** Do staff know how to build positive self-concepts among those in poverty situations? Can they remind an individual what is special about him/her?
9. **Exposure Opportunities:** Do those from poverty have opportunities to become exposed to outside adventures that will increase their awareness of possibilities (e.g. trying new foods, visiting new places, and meeting professionals in a relaxed setting)?
10. **Motivation/Value of Education/Planning for the Future:** Can your staff help people from poverty externalize the blame and raise their awareness about the external barriers that are challenging their progress towards success? Can they make their services meaningful to them? Can they empower and motivate them to challenge those barriers and aim for success?
11. **Welcoming Families and Reaching out to the Community:** Do staff know how to set up a welcoming climate for people in crisis? Do they reach out to the community to understand the social context that surrounds the people they are trying to serve?





## Phase 2: DATA INTERPRETATION AND PRESENTATION

This second phase of the Action Planning and Evaluation Process consists of the following activities:

- Creating focus groups and survey data analysis
- Providing a presentation of the Poverty Competency Assessment findings
- Facilitating brainstorming sessions designed to set new goals specific to the areas for growth
- Determining priorities and deciding on areas to target for improvement
- Defining the guidelines for necessary actions/strategies for improving outcomes for individuals living in poverty

### Outcomes for this phase:

- An increase in the awareness of what your organization is doing that is working
- Actions to impact those areas identified for growth in Phase One assessment results.



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**NOTES** –Use the space below to capture your notes and reflections as Donna talks about each of these core concepts.

### SURVEYING FOCUS GROUPS

### PRESENTING FINDINGS

### DETERMINING NEXT STEPS

| GOAL:   |           |           |          |
|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Actions | Champions | Resources | Progress |
|         |           |           |          |

| GOAL:   |           |           |          |
|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Actions | Champions | Resources | Progress |
|         |           |           |          |

### Phase 3: FINALIZING THE ACTION PLAN

The final phase of the evaluation and action-planning stage provides an opportunity to put the Action Plan developed in Phase 2 into place. Activities in this third phase include:

- Refining actions, plans, and strategies identified in Phase Two
- Identifying necessary resources and measurable outcomes
- Identifying the role of the administration, staff, and physical environment in the proposed change
- Selecting a minimum of three staff to champion each action
- Presenting the comprehensive year-long action plan to improve success for individuals living in poverty to all stakeholders

- Forming implementation groups to ensure its successful results for people living in poverty
- Outlining a timeline for reflecting upon the results from the on-going evaluation

#### Outcomes for this phase:

- A comprehensive year long custom action plan to increase success for individuals living in poverty conditions. This plan is designed to be folded into the organizational improvement plan.
- Actions should be measurable and doable. A 90 day follow-up is needed to check effectiveness of the new actions. The plan may need adjusted and or updated at this point.

**NOTES** – Use the space below to capture your notes and reflections as Donna talks about each of these core concepts.

#### RESOURCES AND OUTCOMES

#### CHAMPIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS

#### IMPLEMENTATION GROUPS

#### TIMELINES



# Activity

## *Moving From WORDS to ACTION: Guideline for Action Plans*

Once you have developed an Action Plan and have identified the roles, resources, and timelines for rolling it out, you must consider the “what-ifs.” By brainstorming challenges and identifying potential problem areas, you can start designing actions to address the challenges in each area on an on-going basis. Use the guidelines generated from Phases One and Two as the general umbrella that provides direction and accountability criteria. However, recognize that these guidelines are subject to revision and change based on the result of the on-going evaluation all through the implementation phase.

**Use the following framework to reflect on each component of your Action Plan. For each strategy, consider:**

**Area/Challenge You Want to Affect** (i.e. attendance, motivation, parent involvement, communication, improved collaboration, partners):

**Desired Outcome:**

**Intervention Strategy:**

**Champions** (three key staff who lead the change):

**Resources** (fiscal, physical, and human):

**Monitoring Progress:** (How will you know it is working?):

**Potential Challenge(s)** or problems to implementation:

**Options and Resources** needed to resolve the challenge(s):

## Self-Reflection

*The information you provide on these questions will help move from words to action. Please answer each question as thoroughly as possible.*

1. What do you feel you are now doing in your work that really makes a difference for people living in poverty?
2. What are two areas you feel you are trying, but not making a difference?
3. Based on our work today, what are two actions you will take when you go back to work that will improve those areas where you have struggled to make a difference?
4. Based on our work today, what are two actions you can take to increase work that you are currently doing to make a real difference?

## Working to Make a Difference

***Below are critical actions to address for improving opportunities for people living in the crisis of poverty. Please mark where you feel you are, personally, in each of the areas below.***

|  | <i>Emerging</i>       | <i>Developing</i>     | <i>Proficient</i>     | <i>Distinguished</i>  |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. You have knowledge of poverty in your community (how many people get lights turned out, have no garbage service etc.).  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. You notice people as soon as they arrive and use active listening skills.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. You serve as a navigator (i.e. people in your organization navigate other systems to provide a comprehensive approach).   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. You help people to build networks of support (or an address book of people who are not in crisis who can support their growth).   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. You work to unravel the shame and blame messages that teach people they are deficient.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. You teach that they need to gain education or training and connect them to appropriate resources.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. You role play appropriate channels and ways to interact with professionals who can help them move forward.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. You regularly examine policies (personal and organizational) to ensure they are serving people in the crisis of poverty and not punishing them.                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. You have a personal and professional network of partnerships and resources to help you in making a difference.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. You introduce people you serve to others who have had success and can encourage and show it is possible.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 11. You take a whole-family approach and not only serve the person in front of you, but learn about their family and what supports they may need and you make necessary connections. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |



## ***From WORDS to ACTION:***

**(We get it. Now what do we do?)**

**Area you want to improve?**

Action 1:

Action 2:

**If you were doing what you know to be right, what would the outcome be for this area you want to improve?**

Action 1:

Action 2:

**What are two actions you can take to grow in this area?**

Action 1:

Action 2:

**What three people in your organization can help you achieve your goals for growing in this area?**

Action 1:

Action 2:

**What resources do you need (physical, fiscal, human) to be successful?**

**Remember your actions must be doable and measurable.**

Action 1:

Action 2:

**Monitoring progress (How will you know it is working?)**

Action 1:

Action 2:

