

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Prairie Community Members Develop Leadership Skills

The Situation

Rural Idaho community members frequently have limited training, time or skills to meet the decision-making challenges their communities face. There are few processes to encourage, grow and support existing and emerging rural leaders as their communities face major economic, social, cultural, and environmental changes. To help create prosperous communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, the University of Idaho partnered with the Northwest Area Foundation (NWAFA) to deliver a community leadership program.

University of Idaho Extension delivered the Horizons program to the Prairie communities of Cottonwood, Keuterville, Ferdinand, Greencreek and 22 other rural Idaho towns. Cottonwood is the largest of the four communities with 944 residents and has a child poverty rate of 7.3%, an elderly poverty rate of 6.2% and an overall rate of 10.7%. In addition, 37.1% of household incomes are less than 200% of the federal poverty rate.

The Nez Perce County Extension Educator served in the role of community coach for these four communities as they moved through the Horizons program, which focuses on poverty reduction, leadership development and community mobilization. The educator worked with a steering committee comprised of 16 local individual volunteers for 18 months to guide the program.

Our Response

The Prairie Horizons communities participated in the Pew Partnership's program, "*LeadershipPlenty: Equipping Citizens to Work for Change*" in April - July 2007. This leadership training is designed to develop community leadership to address poverty by making civic leadership training available to those who may not consider themselves leaders but have much to offer communities. It also strengthens the skills of those who already hold leadership positions. The curriculum focused on community leadership, rather than on individual leadership skill building.

The LeadershipPlenty curriculum consists of nine 3-hour training modules: Finding Leadership Within, Identifying Community Assets, Managing Groups for Results, Making Meetings Work Better, Managing Conflict, Building Strategic Partnerships, Moving from Talk to Action, Valuing Evaluation, and Communicating for Change.

In March 2007, three Prairie Horizons community members participated in 2 ½ days of 'training-the-trainer' on how to facilitate the 27 hour LeadershipPlenty curriculum in their community. The training was conducted by the Pew Partnership and was held in Lewiston, Idaho.

Program Outcomes

Thirty-nine community residents participated in the LeadershipPlenty program. Twenty-two percent of the participants lived in poverty and 55.6% of participants have incomes below 200% of the poverty level.

The community coach and Prairie Horizons Steering Committee engaged many partners for assistance in recruiting low-income participants, coaching of communities, providing meeting room space, refreshments and advertising for the successful delivery of the LeadershipPlenty program. Key partnerships included the Ferdinand and Keuterville Parish Halls, Spirit Center at St. Gertrude's, Ferdinand Gym, Prairie School District, Country Haus, Halfway Club and The Hangout restaurants, and the Keuterville 4-H Livestock Club.

For More Information

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Visit the Prairie Horizons page on the University of Idaho Extension Horizons website:

<http://extension.ag.uidaho.edu/horizons/cottonwood>

Results of post program surveys indicate:

- Participants attributed 55% of their leadership skills to the LeadershipPlenty program.
- 50% of participants intend to use their leadership skills to bring attention to issues of poverty.
- 50% of participants intend to work on poverty reduction in their community.
- 60% of participants intend to become more involved in community decision making.
- 40% of participants intend to recruit others for leadership in their community.
- 25% intend to expand local leadership training.

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