

**BRIDGING THE LOW-INCOME COMMUNITY
LEADERSHIP SKILLS-PRACTICE GAP:
WE-LEAD MODEL**

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Poverty and Rural Communities

- In 2013, in the U.S. the poverty rate
 - for children under 18 years was **19.9%**,
 - for those aged 18 to 64 years was **13.6%**
 - while the rate for those aged 65 and older stood at **9.5%** (*DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014*).
- Between 2011 -2012, the number of those living in poverty in rural increased from 8.0 to 8.5 million.
 - Widened the gap between rural and urban poverty rates, from **2.4** to **3.2** percentage points during the same period (*USDA-ERS, 2014a*).
- During 2007-11, of **703** high-poverty counties (with a poverty rate of 20 percent or higher), **571** were rural.

Poverty and Rural Communities

- Rural communities have continued to face a complex set of challenges:
 - geographic isolation, (transportation, barebones vs chrome plated facilities)
 - sparse and declining human population,
 - loss of jobs and economic opportunities.
- Thus, rural America is not only poor, it is losing people:
 - In 2013 only 15 percent of U.S. residents were rural (spread across 72 percent of the nation's land area (*USDA-ERS, 2014b*)).
- *Closing both the poverty and human capital gap will require developing innovative interventions.*

Community Leadership Development

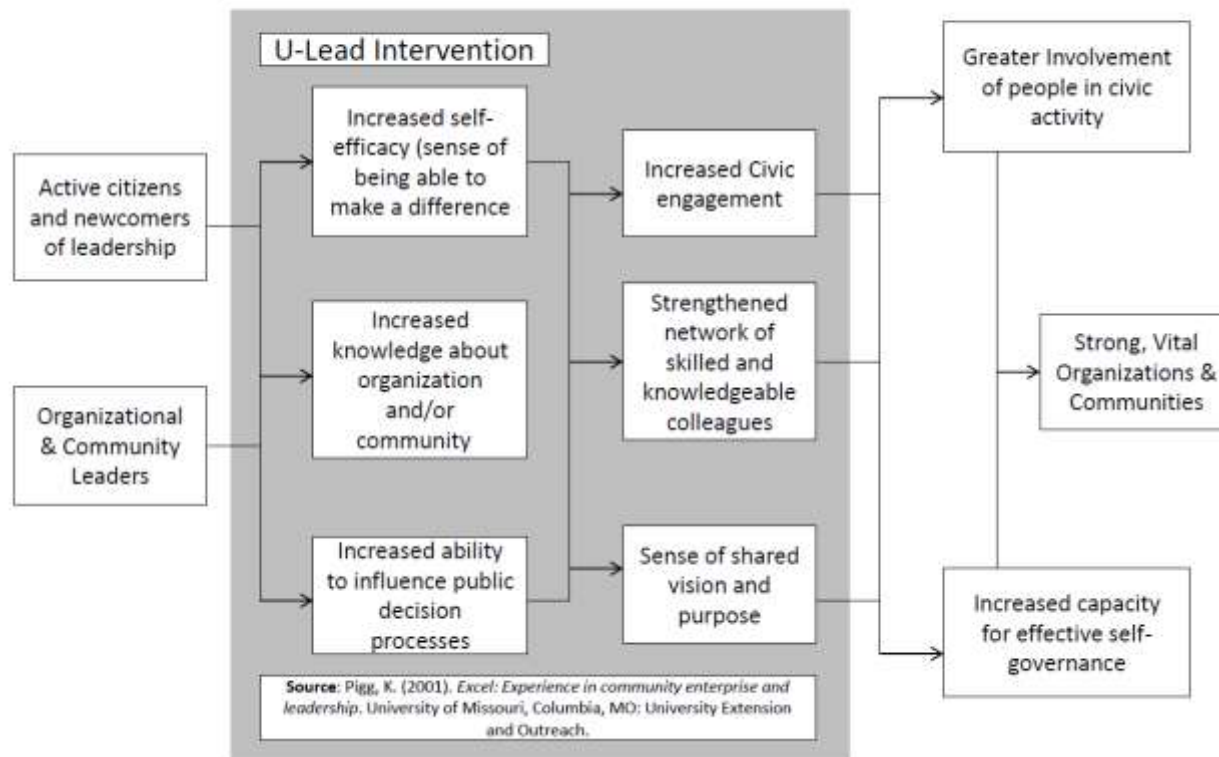
- There has been an expansive movement in leadership development targeting both professionals from community organizations and ordinary community members.
 - Universities,
 - community organizations (e.g. community action agencies),
 - corporations,
 - local government entities, and
 - foundations

independently or collaboratively, devoting tremendous resources in the development of local leadership capacities (*Majee, Maltsberger, Johnson, & Adams, 2014*).

Community Leadership Development

- Both CLPs (professional and low-income) have been found to offer many benefits:
 - increased citizen involvement (volunteer activity) (*Fariborz & Ma'rof, 2008; Kincaid Jr & Knop, 1992*),
 - increased networking among participants and community groups (*Langone & Rohs, 1995*) and
 - increased confidence and leadership skills (*Rohs & Langone, 1993; Whent & Leising, 1992*).

U-Lead Model



U-Lead Model

- According to the U-Lead framework when community members and their leaders participate in community leadership development programs, there is:
 - increased self-efficacy,
 - knowledge about organization and community, and
 - increased ability to influence public decision processes.
- These gains in knowledge and skills foster a sense of shared vision and purpose, strengthened network, and increased civic engagement.
- Ultimately, this results in greater involvement of people in civic activities and increased capacity for effective self-governance which in turn leads to strong, vital organizations and communities (Scheffert, 2007).

Community Leadership Development

The Issue

- There is lack of planned efforts to engage program graduates, particularly low-income graduates in collaborative projects that maximize these benefits at the community level.

Step Up to Leadership

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted June - September with:
 - Graduates (n=55, Women - 44, Men -11)
 - Facilitators (n=19, Women - 13, Men - 6)
 - Community members (n=12, Women – 11, Men -1)
- Interview sites:
 - 6 Community Action Agencies in Missouri
 - 2 urban and 4 rural
 - 1 State Extension office in Illinois
 - Rural



Step Up to Leadership

Voices of the underserved on opportunities

“It depends on what you have going on in the area where you live. If you stay in a dead area and you don’t have a lot of participation or you don’t have a lot of things going on then there will be no opportunities. But for a person who don’t mind going down to city hall and tell them “Look, we need to do something about this or do something about that,” yeah, I think you will find opportunities”

Program Graduate, CAASTLC 12.

“I don’t really think (there are opportunities) just because like in our town (a small community), and it may be the same everywhere, a lot of the people that have been on the boards and the different things are usually(the same) and, stay there for like long periods of time.

Program Graduate, CMCA 9

Step Up to Leadership

“So in one way, yes (there are opportunities). In another way, to have someone who’s come through and may not have very many bridges or very much access in any other area of their life to this kind of formal way of functioning in the world there’s not the systemic support that’s needed. That’s something that is missing on a community level that the community should be responsible for and not the individual.”

Program Facilitator, CMCA 1

“I don’t ever think that there’s enough opportunities. I think there could always be more and I’m definitely one that tries to create those opportunities for them. It’s tough because you have to find a balance because, you know, they have to be engaged. You want them to be engaged because if they’re not engaged then how do you get that fire lit back up.”

Program Facilitator, CMCA 2

Bridging the gaps: the leadership challenge

- *Great challenge* - lack of coordination of existing community resources to create opportunities to engage low-income leadership program graduates.

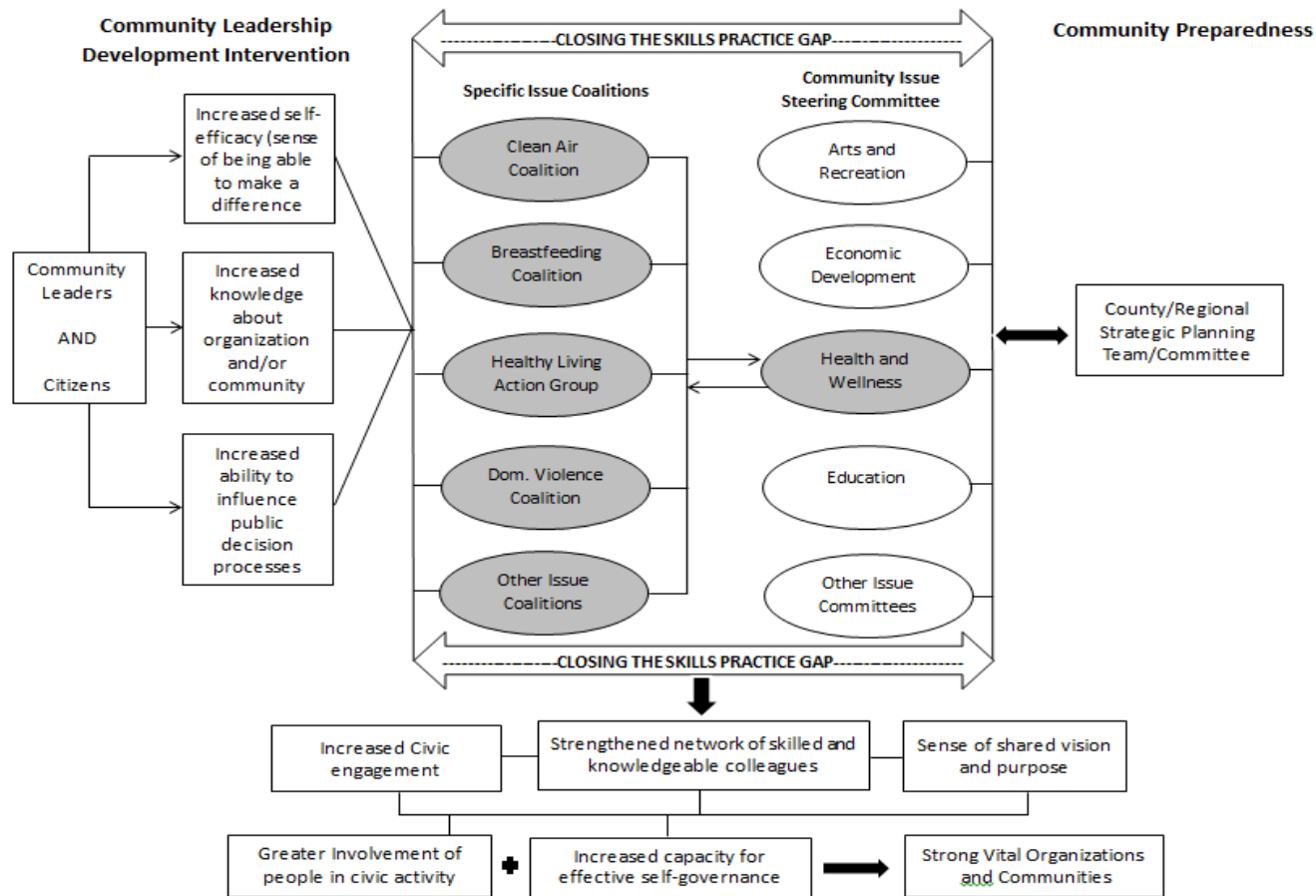


WE-Lead Model

Community Preparedness

- Local level (e.g. County/City) strategic planning committee that navigates and rallies people around specific community issues.
- Community issue steering committees maybe built around:
 - arts and recreation,
 - economic development,
 - education,
 - health and wellness
 - local government, and social services.
- Each of the community issue steering committee identifies community sector groups/coalition to engage ollaboratively in the mitigation of specific community issues.

WE-Lead Model



Conclusion

- People are the greatest assets any community can have.
- The vision of any community should be one in which business, government, and residents work together to foster vibrant communities
- Through working together we can all refine a sense of **“We can Lead!”**

THOUGHTS



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