

Watertown/Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative

Phase 1 Work Plan

Describe the designated nonprofit's qualifications to head the anti-poverty initiative.

For 95 years, the United Way of NNY has been committed to helping low-income residents of Watertown become self-sufficient. The agency is uniquely postured in the City of Watertown to bring individuals, nonprofits, businesses, government agencies and faith based-organizations together to identify and overcome the distinct challenges our City faces in combatting poverty. Working with 45 nonprofit partners, the United Way of NNY mobilizes the North Country to establish and enhance programs that primarily help the working poor.

We fund:

- The 2-1-1 information and referral phone number that provides callers with information on nonprofit services;
- Programs that provide prevention, intervention and crisis care to low-income families;
- Scholarships for children and teens;
- Programs that address substance abuse, domestic violence, food insecurity and transportation for senior citizens.

We recently published the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report, which produced a community-by-community survey on what a "survival income threshold" would be for someone to afford rent, food, transportation, child care, etc., and still have money left over for savings or additional educational opportunities for children. The study showed that 57 percent of households in Watertown are living below the ALICE threshold.

Briefly describe the other organizations and individuals that will serve on the Task Force, as well as why they were selected.

Composition of the Task Force is critical as it must reflect the diversity of the City of Watertown to ensure involvement and buy in at all levels related to the initiative. The United Way of NNY and the Mayor have identified organizations and individuals who:

- a) have a service connection to the individuals affected by poverty,
- b) have a passion due to personal life experience with the issue of poverty,
- c) or, are living in poverty and know well the barriers that are keeping them from moving forward.

It is our hope that we can find a way to involve all who come forward with an interest in the initiative.

Before the Task Force development is concluded, we will assess the parties involved to ensure that the diversity of this group reflects the composition of the community. If we identify areas that are lacking, we will engage service organizations dealing with poverty to help complete the selection process to ensure representation of all facets of our community.

To help set the agenda and lead the plan formulation process we will have a Steering Committee of individuals committed to the community with expertise or experience with poverty. Steering Committee members will also be a part of the Task Force. At this time the individuals who have agreed to participate in the Steering Committee include:

Addie Russell – NYS Assembly	Joe Butler – City of Watertown
Bob Gorman – United Way of Northern New York	Sharon Addison - City of Watertown
Roger Ambrose – Jefferson County Community Services	Erika Flint – Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization
Kevin Jordan – Cornell Cooperative Extension	Melinda Gault – Community Action Planning Council
Patti LaBarr – Watertown City School District	Carole McCoy – Jefferson Community College
Karen Richmond – Children’s Home of Jefferson County	Steve Jennings – Public Health
Reverend Jeff Smith – Baptist Church	Teresa Gaffney – Jefferson County Social Services

If not actively represented on the Task Force, please describe how the Task Force will coordinate with, and obtain input from, the following groups:

- Municipal, county and state government
- Individuals living in poverty
- Community members impacted by poverty
- Local social service districts
- Not-for-profits and faith-based community organizations
- Employers and Business Leaders in the community
- Workforce services entities
- Economic development organizations
- Public safety officials and
- Health services providers

The United Way of NNY has a well-developed network through its service organizations to ensure a diverse representation from all the areas noted above. In addition, since announcing the initiative community members impacted by poverty have been stepping forward and offering to become involved with the development of the plan.

We will also review the selection process to ensure all areas impacted by poverty are represented from neighborhood associations to senior groups to tenant associations.

The populating of work groups will be strategically developed to ensure all areas of the community are involved and their voices heard.

Describe how the Task Force workgroups will be convened and led, including how the ideas of the workgroup members and other stakeholders will be collectively considered to develop recommendations.

Given the aggressive nature of the planning stage, the Steering Committee will meet at least twice per month for the initial period to format and focus the discussions of the Task Force. The Task Force will make the final decision on focus areas and focus priorities and identify the workgroups needed to explore the priorities, identify barriers and develop recommendations. Individuals will self-select which group they would like to be involved with. Workgroups will select a chair and a recorder. Chairs of each work group will become a part of the Steering Committee. Workgroup chairs and the Steering Committee will work together to develop the meeting agendas and will report their progress to the Task Force monthly.

Describe how the Task Force will identify areas of focus, including how priorities will be identified and ranked. Explain how the Task Force recommendations for those areas will be developed and implemented.

The most important strategy to ensure community engagement will be the hosting of a variety of listening sessions. These will include but are not limited to:

- Focus groups – target neighborhood associations, tenant groups, special interest groups
- Surveys of target neighborhoods
- Direct service agency discussions groups
- Town Hall meetings
- Discussion workshops for childcare workers
- Workshop for educators

The goal of this engagement is to gather ideas about barriers keeping people in poverty and ideas for eliminating these barriers. The recommendations coming out of these listening sessions will then be explored at workshops designed to facilitate the development of recommendations.

We will be pursuing the involvement of Vista or AmeriCorps volunteers to assist our efforts in collecting community input and ensuring all portions of the community are involved. The United Way will coordinate this effort with the assistance and support of appropriate not-for-profit partners.

The Steering Committee, including the work group chairs, will supply the leadership for the workshops and will format the research to capture the recommended directions.

The Task Force will take the workshop recommendations and select, by vote, the recommendations which are feasible for implementation and have achievable outcomes for barrier elimination. These will be our focus areas.

Please give a brief overview of Phase 1 of your planned initiative. Be sure to describe how you will engage Task Force members in:

- Collecting and analyzing relevant data
- Using such data to identify high need issues and problems with the local area;
- Identifying specific neighborhoods to be targeted for intervention,
- Selecting one or more focus areas related to the identified issues, problems and/or neighborhoods. Focus areas may include but are not limited to, childhood poverty and homelessness; and
- Developing a plan for how funding will be targeted toward poverty reduction interventions to address the identified issues and problems.

We will use the resources of the City of Watertown Planning Department and the Community Studies group from Jefferson Community College to collect and analyze the relevant data needed to help focus and define the issue of poverty in our community. We are blessed with many great community organizations who have a background in service to those dealing with poverty and will use their data, and experiences as jump off points for defining the issues and looking for recommended areas of focus.

Task Force and work groups will make recommendations to the Steering Committee related to areas of focus both in identified issues and geographic neighborhoods. The Steering Committee will identify the agreed upon strategies for poverty reduction. These strategies in some cases are already in place through local agencies and may need funding to enhance their effectiveness or to increase their capacity. Other recommendations will require a new delivery system and organizations will be invited to create proposals to deliver on these recommendations.

Describe efforts that will be made to secure additional resources to support the poverty reduction initiative, including business and foundation support.

The United Way of NNY will use its development office to pursue community support for the initiative. Marketing, community education, networking, data collection and space sharing are some of the areas of support that will be pursued. Once the initiatives are identified we will pursue financial support and other resources which could enhance sustainability.

In addition, wherever possible we will align existing programs and services in support of the ESPRI initiative with the goal to enhance and expand their delivery and effectiveness.

Describe your goals for Phase 1, as well as an estimated time frame for each goal.

Goal #1 – Identify and populate Initiative leadership.

- By December 16th - identify and populate Steering Committee
- By January 13th – identify and populate the Task Force

Goal #2 – Identify focus areas.

- By January 27th – narrow the focus of the initiative and establish work groups

Goal #3 – Community Engagement

- By January 27th – approve a plan which could include a variety of different vehicles to collect input.
- By March 24th - complete the listening sessions – engaging the community.
- By April 14th – complete the work group assessments of input from community engagement

Goal #4 – Identify Focus Priorities

- By April 28 – collect and review recommendations and identify areas of focus

Goal #5 – Identify Solutions to address areas of priority

- By May 12th – publish report of findings
- By June 16th – Identify innovative solutions and measureable outcomes to address the issue of reducing poverty in Watertown

Goal #6 Submit Phase 2 Work Plan

- By June 30th

Identify who will be responsible for tracking and evaluating the success of the initiative, including developing a report to summarize Task Force findings and recommendations. Note, a report must be submitted to OTDA that, at a minimum summarizes workgroups established and recommended poverty reduction strategies identified by the workgroups and Task Force recommendations for Phase 2 activity.

The United Way of NNY will be responsible for managing the initiative and tracking its progress against stated goals and timelines. Bob Gorman, Executive Director of the United Way will work closely with the Mayor's office through the City Manager Sharon Addison to ensure accountability to the task. Staff will be brought on when needed to support data collection, meeting minutes and report development. Peter Schmitt, retired CEO of the Watertown Family YMCA, will be the Project Director and coordinate the process.