

Executive Summary

PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT

The Western Arizona Council of Governments' (WACOG) Community Action Program (CAP) Community Needs and Assets Assessment for the Region IV (La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma Counties) Community Action Program and its partners is intended to gauge opinions, assumptions, needs, key issues, and/or assets within Region IV.

This document has been specifically developed for use by WACOG in establishing the regional Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) priorities for the Program Year 2010 and beyond.

This tool is intended to provide WACOG with a "Road Map" to clearly demonstrate the linkages between community needs, assets, and the services to be provided. In addition, this tool will be used for the planning services, conducted by WACOG for the region, such as the Title XX – Social Service Block Grant Planning (SSBG) and transportation planning.

COMMUNITY SERVICE BLOCK GRANT (CSBG)

The Community Service Block Grant ensures that WACOG programs provide a safety net of services to the Region IV communities, works to prevent homelessness, addresses community transportation needs, supports independent living for the elderly and provides the foundation for the development of self-sufficient, healthy, caring, and productive children and families. The organization's services extend a helping hand to residents in times of crisis or need.

In Region IV, the Community Service Block Grant provides the infrastructure to provide the safety net to working poor and other income challenged families as well as seed money for the development of needed programs and services for the region that focus on low-income and vulnerable populations achieving economic self-sufficiency.

These activities are conducted under the coordinated efforts of the Western Arizona Council of Governments' (WACOG) Executive Board,ⁱ Management Committee,ⁱⁱ Community Action Board,ⁱⁱⁱ

and the focus, foresight, and implementation of the organization's executive management team.

DESCRIPTION OF WACOG

As the Region IV Community Action Agency (CAA) WACOG provides a comprehensive array of services to help people achieve their highest level of self-sufficiency. Services and programs reach a diverse population of Region IV residents from preschool age children and their families participating in Head Start activities to older adults attending senior center programs and services.

WACOG has been dedicated to the health and well-being of the communities and people WACOG serves for over 38 years.

WACOG focuses its efforts on alleviating the symptoms and eradicating the causes of poverty by helping people help themselves when they are in economic, social and/or educational need. WACOG does this by identifying changing community needs and mobilizing resources, administering programs that address ongoing community needs, and individual and systemic advocacy on behalf of those WACOG serves.

In this capacity WACOG provides a myriad of programs and services to Region IV residents ranging from senior services to transportation planning, early childhood development services to housing, and Social Service Block Grant planning to homelessness prevention.

DESCRIPTION OF REGION IV

Region IV covers the western part of the State of Arizona with the Colorado River running along or through each of the Counties. Encompassing 23,502 square miles (approximately 21% of Arizona) , Region IV is larger than the combined square miles of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

The region is not only geographically large, but as a result of the Grand Canyon, in order to reach isolated

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parts of Mohave County, travel through Las Vegas, Nevada and Utah are necessary.

Within the large service area, there is a wide diversity in communities, cultures, and environments. Communities vary from Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) to incorporated towns with less than 2,500 people. In addition, the Region is influenced by a variety of cultures ranging from a strong Hispanic influence to a variety of tribes and their associated cultures. Beyond historical influences, a large number of seasonal residents and visitors impact the culture of the Region as well. Finally, environmental impacts on the communities range from desert to areas that receive snowfall, mountains to flat lands, and extreme heat to extreme cold.

DESCRIPTION OF REGION IV POPULATION

Region IV has a large population base of elderly, children, disabled, and low-income. In most communities, the demand for services and programs far outweighs the funding and availability of services to assist families that need a safety net. In addition, regional infrastructure is taxed with large influxes of seasonal and winter visitors.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

According to the Arizona Department of Economic Security, Research Administration, Population Statistics Unit, growth in Region IV has substantially outpaced the national average over the last seventeen years. From 1990 to 2007 the population has grown 27.53% and it is projected by 2019 there will be 567,807 Region IV residents. This is an additional 140,858 Arizonans that may need WACOG services.

AGE COMPOSITION

As mentioned previously, there is a significant number of elderly in the region, as of 2007 19.61% of the residents are estimated to be age 65 or older. In addition, it is projected that 10.84% of the population

will be reaching the age of 65 over the next eight years.¹

RACIAL/ETHNIC COMPOSITION & NATIVITY

Approximately 33.98% of the Region IV is Hispanic or Latino, while only 29.6% of Arizona and 15.1% of the U.S. population as a whole is Hispanic or Latino in origin. Non-Hispanic white residents represent 60.39% of the Region's population. Combined, these two groups comprise 94.37% of the population.²

The 2000 Census indicated that the number of foreign born persons within Region IV far exceeded the national and State averages. Yuma County (24.0%) is far above the national (11.1%) and State (12.8%) averages and Mohave County (5.9%) and La Paz County (9.7%) are below the State and U.S. averages.

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT

Within the region, approximately 23% of the population is not a high school graduate. In addition, 57.15% of the residents age 25 or older have an education level of high school or less.

At the other end of the spectrum, in 2007 11.65% of the Region's population 25 years or older had a Bachelor's Degree or Graduate/professional degree versus the State (25.3%) and national (27.0%) averages.³

UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment has historically been a serious issue in Region IV. From 2000 to 2007, unemployment ranged from a low of 13.90% to a high of 16.5% in Yuma County and a low of 5.1% to a high of 7.0% in La Paz County far outpacing the national and state percentages.⁴

¹ County & City Data Book: 2007 U.S. Census Bureau; 2005 Data.

² U.S. Census Bureau and Arizona Department of Commerce, Population Statistics Unit.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2005-2007.

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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In 2008, the Region's unemployment ranged in each County dramatically. In the fourth quarter of 2008 La Paz County's rate ranged from 7.9-8.4%. Mohave County's 2008 monthly unemployment rate ranged from 4.8% in April to 8.5% (preliminary) in December. Yuma County's 2008 monthly unemployment rate ranged from 9.0% in March to 22.6% in August.⁵

PERSONS IN POVERTY

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 16% of the residents in Region IV live at or below poverty level. Within the region the percentage to the total county population ranges significantly. 23.8% of La Paz County, 13.5%, Mohave County, and 17.8% Yuma County residents live at or below poverty level versus the U.S. average of 13% and the State average of 14.1%.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey, the percentage of population in the Region IV Counties with a disability ranges from 24.5% to 16.4%, which is significantly higher than the Arizona average of 14.4% of the population. Of the population age 16 to 64, the percentage of people with a disability that work are substantially lower in Region IV (La Paz County 24.2%, Mohave County 29.9%, and Yuma County 31.2%) than the U.S. (36.7%) and Arizona 36.8% averages.

Of the population 5 years and older with a disability, the percentage of the population that lives below poverty level is significantly higher in parts of Region IV (La Paz-24.3%, Mohave – 18.3%, and Yuma – 23.1%) than the national (21.4%) and Arizona (18.8%) medians.

HOUSING

In 2007, Region IV leads the State in the percentage of housing units that are mobile homes or trailers. 52.3% of the housing units in La Paz County are estimated to be mobile homes or trailers. In Mohave County

27.8% and in Yuma County 32.9% of the homes are mobile homes or trailers.³

The national median value for mobile homes is \$40,400, Arizona \$54,800, La Paz County \$77,000, Mohave County \$83,800, and Yuma County \$49,100.²

According to the Arizona Department of Housing: "2008 Arizona's Housing Market ...a *glance*," issued at the 2008 Governor's Housing Forum, September 2008, many people can not afford to live in the communities that they work.

For example, police officers, teachers, and firefighters can not afford to purchase a home in Bullhead City, Lake Havasu City, and Yuma. In Kingman police officers can afford to purchase a home in the communities they serve but not teachers, nurses, and firefighters. In San Luis police officers and nurses can afford to purchase a home but not teachers nor firefighters.

Service workers such as retail workers and waitpersons can not afford to rent or own in any of the report's identified Region IV communities.

Process To Determine Priorities

Four methods were utilized to obtain community input into the regional priorities: Existing Data, Key Informant Interviews, the Community Action Program Survey, and a regional Focus Group.

EXISTING DATA

Already existing statistical data was used to obtain insights about the well-being of people. This approach provided descriptive statistics, such as census data, labor surveys, affordable housing tax reports, tax credit reports, etc.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Fourteen (14) informants were utilized as a method of obtaining more in-depth information from key community stakeholders. This methodology was utilized as an effective tool for seeking the input and advice of people who are regularly involved in addressing community problems.

⁵ Arizona Department of Commerce, Research Administration

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During the key informant selection process great effort was used to ensure geographic, cultural, and expert diversity. In total, the 14 Key Informants had over 333 years of experience with Region IV.

COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM SURVEY

The Community Action Program Survey was used to gather information from community service providers about issues affecting the well-being of low-income, elderly, disabled, and other vulnerable residents. There were eighty-six (86) responses from service providers in the region covering a diverse range of services and programs. Respondents provide low-income residents with services ranging from food and meals to financial management services, housing and shelter to utility services, elderly services to early childhood education, and disability services to other low-income programs.

Fifty-three percent (53%) of the respondents serve La Paz County, seventy-one (71%) Mohave County and sixty percent (60%) Yuma County. The majority of respondents serve multiple counties within Region IV versus a one county service area.

Overall State budget shortfalls and the accompanying budget reductions and in some cases funding eliminations, for services to low and moderate income families, is decreasing and eliminating valuable services. While at the same time, the economic hardships such as the struggling economy, loss of jobs, and mortgage default rates are impacting Region IV residents and increasing demand for services. Specifically, food banks have noted a surge in demand with limited resources. There is a growing trend in the increased need for food assistance beyond the families that live at or below the poverty line. Middle class families are feeling the need to stretch their food dollars and have to make decisions that affect their families' ability to meet their basic needs.

FOCUS GROUP

A regional Focus Group was utilized to review the 'Key Informant Interview' and 'CAP Community Assessment Survey' results, identify barriers to accessing services, provide suggestions and strategies

for improving service delivery, provide input into regional community priorities and identify local, if any, resources to address the priorities.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Utilizing the information from existing data, key informant interviews, the community action program survey, and the regional focus group, ten priorities for the area were developed: 1) Economic development and livable wage jobs, 2) Health care, 3) Affordable housing and homeownership, 4) Quality early childhood development and child care, 5) Education and job training, 6) Improve and maintain social service infrastructure, 7) Community outreach & involvement, 8) Development of new and alternative fund sources, 9) Transportation, and 10) 'Livable Communities.'

Throughout the community input process the symbiotic relationship between the regional priorities was repeatedly emphasized. For example, the economic development and livable wage issues have a strong relationship with housing affordability and homeownership, educational needs have a strong relationship with the affordability and availability of health care to community members and the overall concept of a 'Livable Community,' and the relationship between community outreach and involvement and improving and maintaining service

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LIVABLE WAGE JOBS

To position Region IV advantageously in the Arizona, national, and global economy, economic development efforts should focus on strategies that will lead to the creations of higher paying jobs. Concepts and strategies that are recommended include supporting strategies that: 1) Diversify the local economy by engaging in development programs that result in employment opportunities for the existing labor force, 2) Focus on increasing employment with 'livable wage' jobs, 3) Help existing business thrive and expand by providing training and assistance to upgrade old economy enterprises, 4) Expand the concept of return on public investment to include quality job creation

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that includes livable wage and quality of life factors and thus minimize the fiscal impact of poverty-wage service jobs, and 5) Maximize the amount of state and federal funding into the region with activities such as supporting the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

HEALTH CARE

Throughout Region IV emphasis needs to be given on eliminating root causes and promoting lifestyle practices, preventable diseases such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease will continue to increase if community agencies that are currently working to improve health outcomes and health status are not adequately supported.

In order to address these issues and assist more low-income Arizonans to improve their chances for affordable, quality health care, certain actions are recommended: 1) Expanding existing public health care programs, 2) Providing incentive and assurances to increase insurance coverage, and 3) Supporting community health clinics.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMEOWNERSHIP

In addition to supporting low-income homeownership opportunities, affordable housing and homeownership objectives support other regional priorities such as: economic development, education, and livable communities. Affordable housing and homeownership opportunities also provide vital public service workers such as police officers, teachers, nurses, and firefighters the opportunity to reside in the communities that they serve.

The current Arizona and local housing market and economy necessitate devising options to ensure homeownership remains affordable and thus encouraging thriving communities. Long-term solutions need to be incorporated into the local housing stock to ensure that affordable homeownership continues to be an option to the public.

To assist in the elimination of poverty in Arizona and the region, affordable housing efforts should focus on

three areas, 1) Continuing the use of various federal and state resources to subsidize the cost of housing for low and moderate income households, 2) Promoting efforts at the local government level to reduce the cost of housing through innovative design and the reduction of barriers, and 3) The incorporation of energy conservation into the housing for low and moderate income families.

QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE

Creating a society that has a balance of services that strive to assist people in achieving self-sufficiency versus dependency is vital. Quality early childhood development and child care programs, such as Head Start, are an opportunity to address this issue at a young age and reduce disparities between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots.’

In the Arizona Community Action Association report, “Poverty in Arizona: Working Towards Solutions,” it was noted that “high quality child care is important for all children. Research has revealed that the first three years of life are critical times for brain development. Studies have shown that young children exposed to high-quality settings exhibit better learning and social skills.”

To expand opportunities for low-income parents and parents of disabled children to receive quality, affordable care for their children while they work, the following recommendations are being made. 1) Expanding existing publicly supported child care programs, 2) Promoting the expansion of privately sponsored affordable child care, and 3) Ensuring quality and accessibility.

EDUCATION AND JOB TRAINING

It is important that the Region IV workforce be well-educated and equipped to meet the needs of our local economy if our residents are to thrive. Research indicates that communities with low education levels also have high unemployment, low personal income, and high crime rates.

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It is critical for education in our community to create a system and environment that prepares students for all options and opportunities. One way to ensure the educational success of students is to have sound early childhood learning programs for children at an early age. Pre-school programs such as Head Start enhance school readiness so children starting school can fully benefit from kindergarten classes, paving the way for positive experiences throughout their school years.

In order to assist Region IV residents in achieving the highest quality of life possible and assist in the elimination of poverty, education and job training efforts should focus on six areas, 1) Promoting early education 2) Promoting increases in high school graduation rates, 3) Encouraging and supporting community-wide belief of job skills training through volunteerism and civic engagement, 4) Encouraging and supporting the highest quality of education is provided to students, 5) Promoting training and skill development, and 5) Providing post-high school and life-long learning opportunities. (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, July 2003)

IMPROVE AND MAINTAIN SOCIAL SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE

During these trying times of economic hardship, now more than ever, Arizonans face multiple barriers while other issues preclude many from attaining full self-sufficiency. Region IV, as well as statewide, needs a strong, comprehensive system of social and income supports to strengthen and support all families through good and bad times.

With the economic downturn and the state budget reductions, some non-profits are struggling to ensure the service distribution infrastructure continues to exist to help people. In other cases, nonprofits are struggling to manage the the reductions of services to clients. For example, severe reductions to elderly home based services will lead to the elderly, that can not live at home without assistance, being moved to long-term care facilities.

But with hardship, new and innovative methods of improving and maintaining the local social service

infrastructure can occur and be used to ensure a strong footing for success in the future. In order to achieve this the following two (2) recommendations are being presented: 1) Identify methods to streamline services to clients and 2) Identify new methods of doing business that are more effective and efficient.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & INVOLVEMENT

Community outreach and involvement are building blocks of individual character, values and positive personal and community identity. Starting at a young age, children and adults should have the opportunity to participate in healthy and meaningful activities and community service, enhancing their ability to be successful in school, employment and life.

Throughout the key informant interviews, Community Action Program Survey, and regional focus group community outreach and involvement was noted as a key opportunity to address the needs of the Region IV community needs. In most cases this was perceived as a two way street, the more the public knows about a nonprofit the more they will be involved.

In order to achieve increased community outreach and involvement the following two (2) recommendations are being presented: 1) Identify impactful methods of reaching out to the public, clients, and partners and 2) Identify new methods of increasing volunteerism in the community.

DEVELOPMENT OF NEW AND ALTERNATIVE FUND SOURCES

In today's world, nonprofits have to function like professional businesses or else they will cease to exist. With fewer grants available today, nonprofit organizations are looking toward social enterprise as a way to develop revenue and sustain programs. Social entrepreneurship is not fundraising. It is a business that delivers a consistent stream of income earned through selling products, services, sponsorships, or space.

Social enterprises are a proven way for nonprofits to generate their own sources of funding. The idea has been successfully applied for nearly 70 years by the

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Girls Scouts through its annual cookie sale and by the Children's Television Workshop through the marketing of its Sesame Street brand.

Organizations can increase their social impact by building on internal assets while reducing their dependency on fund raising.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation planning has a huge impact on the lives of people in their communities. It determines many things: household expenditures, access to employment, where people choose to live, as well as economic opportunities. The type, quality and availability of transportation services directly impacts on one's access to basic necessities: education and employment, health care, social services, recreational activities, as well as access to visit with family and friends. Where one lives, as well as priority given by local or regional governments to provision of transportation services, makes a major difference in poverty-reduction strategies as well.

Low income Arizonans cite transportation as one of the most significant barriers to finding and maintaining employment. Studies show that a parent with a car is more likely to be employed and work longer hours than one without a car (Joint Center for Poverty Research).

To expand transportation opportunities for low-income families it is recommended that: 1) Clearly understand the needs and gaps, 2) Increase the use of public transportation resources that offer an array of transportation services, and 3) Creatively encourage the development of local service through community partnerships and coordination.

'LIVABLE COMMUNITIES.'

A livable community is one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options, which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life. (Partners, 2009)

Many of the priorities identified in this document are aspects of a 'Livable Community.' The concept of a livable community places the priorities into the context of the symbiotic relationship that exists. For example, if people are able to walk to work, shopping and other supportive community features the need for transportation is minimized.

To expand and build on the livable communities' concept, three (3) principals are being recommended based on the Center for Livable Communities' Ahwahnee Principals: 1) Resource-Efficient Communities, 2) Smart Growth: Economic Development for the 21st Century, and 3) Water Principles for Resource-Efficient Land Use. (LGC, 2009)

WACOG & REGIONAL PRIORITIES

While WACOG is not necessarily the key service provider to address such a wide variety of community priorities. WACOG does have the potential to provide supportive and complimentary activities to help the local communities attain the highest level of community impact possible. WACOG's comprehensive array of services that assist residents in achieving their highest level of self-sufficiency play a clear part in achieving the regional priorities.

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- ⁱ The WACOG Executive Board consists of an elected official from each of the incorporated entities within the Region IV (La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma Counties) and each of the applicable County School Superintendents.
 - ⁱⁱ The WACOG Management Committee consists of city and town managers (or their designee) from each of the incorporated entities within the Region IV (La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma Counties).
 - ⁱⁱⁱ The Region IV Community Action Board (CAB) is a tripartite board equally composed of public, private, and low-income representation.