

## What Makes



*Enabling Local Action Toward Prosperity for All*

### Different from Other Community Development Approaches?

Prosperous Communities, Prosperous Nation (PCPN) begins from a simple conclusion drawn from two simple facts about poverty.

- Poverty is a systemic issue that affects us all and therefore requires systemic thinking, planning, and action.
- No one person, organization, political party, or sector of society has “the answer” that will solve the problem.

Given these facts and the high stakes the nation faces if we do nothing different, the simple truth is this:

*We have to get the whole system together to figure it out.*

We have seen few, if any, approaches that can accomplish this, particularly on a national scale, with communities as the drivers. PCPN uses an existing approach that:

- *Starts at the community level*, where the people know what supports, strategies, or solutions they need to fully address community poverty and increase prosperity for all. No Federal or other outside entity can know what supports, strategies, or solutions any particular community needs to address its issues of poverty and to build community prosperity, and attempts to prescribe solutions to communities often fail. **This strategy enables local control, local planning, and local action.**
- *Engages the “whole system,”* to include **broad participation, including residents, members of multiple sectors the community itself identifies**, including local, state, and Federal policy makers. Each community brings together 60 to 80 stakeholders who among them have the experiences, authority, resources, expertise, information, and need to act. As they proceed into developing their action plans together, they need not ask permission from anyone not present. **This principle removes the single biggest barrier to large group planning – not having all the key players in the room.**
- *Was created for the express purpose of helping people go beyond problem-solving to make systemic improvements in their communities.* It has been employed with virtually all social, technological, and economic issues in North and South America, Africa, Australia, Europe, India and South Asia. **People achieve four outputs from a single session – shared values, a plan for the future, concrete goals, and an implementation strategy.**

- *Uses a methodology that is proven to enable cooperation in complex situations of high conflict and uncertainty. **The methodology relies on tested principles for helping people collaborate despite differences of culture, class, gender, age, race, ethnicity, language, and education.*** The method works equally well with communities, schools, hospitals, churches, government agencies, foundations and NGO's and has documented success in each of these. Because the methodology is culture free, requiring only that participants share their experiences, it has helped thousands of people carry out action plans once considered impossible.
- *Is proven to produce positive outcomes. **Hundreds of communities have created action plans and high commitment to implementing the plans they create using this approach already.*** Participants often start implementing plans they claimed were unthinkable before and achieve long-lasting outcomes. A few examples of outcomes include the demobilization of thousands of child soldiers from the front lines of war in Sudan; the reduction of African-American infant mortality rates in Milwaukee, WI; the formation of America's Promise, the Alliance for Youth; the resolution of racial tensions between two Berrien County, MI communities and the collaborative integration of economic development; and the reconnection of struggling members of the rural community of Ko'olau Loa, HI to their healthy traditional values.
- *Creates broad responsibility for action:* Managers/facilitators work in such a way that participants develop their own conclusions, manage their own small group work, and take responsibility for whatever they choose to do. In short, they help people with differing experiences and views listen to one another and discover their shared commitments. Those in leadership roles find previously unavailable backing and resources. The principles of the methodology enable broadly-supported action plans that are creative, practical, and implementable. This methodology differs from so-called "town hall" meetings, because **participants walk away with plans that they created, they supported, and that they can realistically implement together.**
- *Bridges the gap between communities and policy.* While communities have the largest stake in creating prosperous conditions for themselves and often have significant capacity to address their own issues of poverty, one of the major challenges communities face in being truly enabled to address their issues of poverty has been the inability to influence policy at higher levels of government that would create the enabling conditions they need. The program will engage interested communities across the country in meaningful planning and rapid action that *includes* the participation of local, state, and Federal policy makers, followed by similar planning and action by the policy makers themselves intended to produce action plans for developing enabling policy. This method of community-to-policy planning and action **bridges the gap between the community – where the issues of poverty are directly experienced and the implications of policy are felt – and the policy making engine,** which is

typically isolated from community-level realities and the implications of its policies.

- *Builds community-by-community to create national impact.* Once eight communities participate in the program, a “Future of Policy” Future Search conference will be convened. In the first cycle of the program, eight communities will participate and produce their “prosperity plans.” During this cycle, higher-level policy issues that hinder communities’ ability to create sustainable prosperity will naturally emerge and will be used in subsequent policy planning sessions, in which the policy makers from all of the individual community planning sessions will convene using the same methodology to develop action plans for developing enabling policy. The learning and outcomes from a complete community-to-policy cycle would be documented and analyzed to inform the next cycle, which could include even more communities and policy makers in a single cycle. Therefore, not only would each participating community become more prosperous from implementing the action strategies they develop in the individual action conferences, but their efforts would be collectively leveraged to produce the higher-level policy changes they need to become even more prosperous long after their individual conference. As these cycles continue, **several thousands of residents in dozens of communities across the country and hundreds of policy makers, all focusing on addressing poverty and creating prosperity in new ways will have actively participated, making lasting change at the national level inevitable.**

Taken together, these characteristics translate into several “at leasts” that are not seen in current approaches to addressing local or national poverty.

- We would at least have the whole system working on the issue, which is systemic itself.
- The plans that *affect* the whole system would at least be *created* by the whole system using information and experiences *from* the whole system.
- The high level of commitment to implementation that has already been demonstrated will at least increase the likelihood that the plans lead to real change.
- The community-to-policy cycle will at least ensure that the people making the policies have the opportunity to directly experience community realities before going back into their policy community to develop policies intended to enable sustainable community prosperity.

If you or your organization would like to support or participate in this program or would like more information, please email us at [prosperouscommunities@futuresearch.net](mailto:prosperouscommunities@futuresearch.net) or call Nancy Polend, Program Director at (540) 937-4897. You may also check the Future Search Network web site for updates on the Prosperous Communities, Prosperous Nation program at <http://www.futuresearch.net/>.