

Northwest Area Foundation

In March of 1999, the Northwest Area Foundation retained FowlerHoffman to create an overview and profiles of potential audiences for the Foundation's Community Connections program. Community Connections was designed to provide information, products and services to communities within the Foundation's eight-state region (Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington) in order to reduce poverty and create a healthy, sustainable future.

FowlerHoffman proposed a two-phase strategy, wherein the Foundation would first determine potential audiences and then proceed to exploring those audiences' needs and preferences for information, products and services.

Phase I Research

The Phase I research began with a literature review and a series of in-depth interviews with leadership of national and regional organizations that provide products and services for poverty reduction. The interview questions were designed to gain a better understanding of the organizations' constituencies, with particular attention paid to identifying potential audiences that might not be typically associated with poverty reduction but would have something to contribute and/or gain from being involved.

In identifying audiences within the Foundation's eight-state region, FowlerHoffman utilized a variation of Dr. Paul Riedesel's Archetypal Analysis model, an alternative to traditional audience segmentation. Based on information gleaned from a literature review and in-depth interviews, the firm identified distinct audience groups (archetypes) to test in site visits and group discussions that were held throughout the eight-state region. The audience groups are defined as Archetypes because of the unique qualities that differentiate their levels of participation in and knowledge of poverty reduction and their unique needs for poverty reduction products and services. The five Archetypes are:

- A. Professionals in fields with one or more elements of poverty reduction as the primary mission, such as community advocacy groups, direct service providers and Community Development Corporations.



- B. Professionals for whom one or more elements of poverty reduction is a possible byproduct of their work but is not the primary mission, such as elected and appointed government officials, banks and financial institutions, health providers and insurers, business, educators, utility providers and local media.
- C. Volunteers (or minimally reimbursed individuals) and volunteer organizations working on one or more elements of poverty reduction as the primary mission, such as food pantries, community gardens, homeless shelters, and individuals who volunteer for any of the Archetype A organizations.
- D. Volunteers (or minimally reimbursed individuals) and volunteer organizations for which one or more elements of poverty reduction is a possible byproduct of their work but is not the primary mission, such as civic groups, fraternal societies, church and school volunteer groups, self-help groups and support groups.
- E. Individuals who are moving themselves out of poverty and the families and friends who are supporting their efforts. This includes those living below the poverty line as well as those who work multiple low-wage jobs to support themselves and/or their families.

In preparing for Phase II, FowlerHoffman concluded that along with identifying the types of poverty reduction products and services needed, the Foundation must determine how to reach these audiences, and in some cases motivate them to become involved. For example, Archetypes A and C focus on poverty reduction as their primary mission, therefore, reaching and motivating them to become involved would not be an issue. The challenge for these Archetypes was to determine the most appropriate products and services the Foundation could provide. FowlerHoffman recommended that the Foundation focus on developing centralized information systems of poverty reduction resources to bring the vast knowledge and experience of the field to increase capacity at the community level. The systems would be Web-based and would include feedback mechanisms that would allow them to continually evolve to best meet the needs of the audience.

The research identified important untapped audiences that could be contributing more to poverty reduction with better understanding and tools. FowlerHoffman reasoned that because poverty reduction is a possible byproduct of their work, empowering Archetypes B and D to increase their motivation, understanding and use of tools could greatly impact the lives of many.



The firm recommended that the Foundation utilize professional associations and umbrella organizations to reach these Archetypes.

The research pointed resoundingly to the need to include Archetype E, individuals moving themselves out of poverty, in all Community Connections activities. FowlerHoffman determined that this could be accomplished by ensuring that all Foundation-funded activities seek out these individuals' input and feedback and by providing stipends for these individuals to serve as advisors to professional and volunteer poverty reduction organizations.

Phase II Research

For the Phase II research, the Foundation placed a priority on Archetypes B, specifically banking/financial professionals and local government officials, and E, specifically recent immigrants and individuals leaving welfare. FowlerHoffman conducted in-depth interviews, roundtable discussions and site visits, among other research activities, in order to identify and illuminate how best to involve these audiences in poverty reduction; the most effective channels for information sharing; and good strategies and examples of products and services to reach these audiences.

For banking/financial professionals and local government officials, the first challenge to involving them in poverty reduction is their lack of awareness of what poverty reduction has to do with their jobs. FowlerHoffman recommended that the Foundation address this challenge by designing communications to increase this audience's understanding that poverty reduction is about the people in their own communities, including neighbors and employees, who are struggling to afford housing and feed their families. In addition, this audience must be made to understand that what they are already doing – economic development, civic management, home loans, etc. – can be done in ways that help move individuals out of poverty. For banking/financial professionals specifically, it is essential that top leadership be committed to making poverty reduction a priority for their institutions. Local government officials can become more involved in poverty reduction by seeing concrete examples of what has worked in other communities.

The research regarding recent immigrants and individuals moving themselves off welfare revealed that these populations face major barriers to becoming involved in poverty reduction



efforts. Barriers include the welfare stigma that dissuades individuals from accessing services and discrimination and legal status issues, perceived or real, that make immigrants reluctant to approach service providers. Both of these groups cited negative experiences with government social services and some nonprofit providers. FowlerHoffman determined that the delivery of products and services to help these individuals move out of poverty must be personalized and must address the specific needs of the individual in a respectful manner. The firm identified best practices for encouraging the involvement of low-income individuals, such as holding meetings in familiar venues; using the home language of recent immigrants as the primary language on materials; using jargon-free language at an appropriate literacy level; and holding events at times that are convenient and provide child care.

FowlerHoffman identified seven communication channels through which information on poverty reduction could be shared: Interpersonal; Formal Education; Convenings; Publications; Electronic Communication; Knowledge Bases; and Mass Media.

With these communication channels in mind, the firm then applied and expanded Everett M. Rogers' "Innovation Decision-Making Steps," which identifies the stages by which an individual passes from first knowledge of an innovation through its adoption or rejection, in order to shape strategies that would be appropriate for target audiences at the various stages of receiving information on poverty reduction.

For Type B professionals in business/finance and local government, the following stage by stage strategies were identified:

Stage 1. Knowledge: Educate this audience on poverty reduction and the reasons for addressing it through their work using mass media and association publications.

Stage 2. Persuasion & Decision: Peer-to-peer communication can best persuade opinion leaders to become more active in poverty reduction. Use existing associations as the trusted messengers for convenings and dissemination.



Stage 3. Implementation: Professionals want support from their peers for implementing projects. Networks should be established and/or enhanced to promote poverty reduction.

Stage 4. Confirmation: Opinion leaders want recognition from their peers. Use recognition as a means to reinforce adoption of poverty reduction strategies. Recognition is also good public relations for both government and financial institutions.

For Type B professionals, examples of poverty-reduction information products and services appropriate for each of these stages include:

- To build knowledge: mass media public education programs, including print and broadcast messages.
- To persuade and support implementation: opportunistic use of change agents to communicate peer-to-peer through association and educational institution convenings and publications.
- To confirm: awards, stipends and publicity for successful innovators.

For type E individuals moving themselves out of poverty, specifically recent immigrants and individuals leaving welfare, the following stage-by-stage strategies were identified:

Stage 1. Knowledge: Clearly this audience does not need to be informed on the need for poverty reduction, but access to knowledge about available resources needs to be expanded.

Stage 2. Persuasion & Decision: Making low-income individuals aware of available resources is often not enough to persuade them to act on the information. The best change agents at this crucial point for this audience are individuals who have successfully moved out of poverty and who are willing to act as advocates, counselors and/or mentors. Support for low-income individuals to become “change agents” is critical.

Stage 3. Implementation: As low-income individuals move into the mainstream workforce, they need ongoing support from individuals like themselves to maintain their progress. Equally important is access to information they need to make this transition, such as child care options and available transportation.



Stage 4. Confirmation: For individuals moving out of poverty, self-sufficiency is the greatest confirmation. Public recognition is often unwelcome and confidentiality is highly prized. Because the road to self-sufficiency is often filled with setbacks, knowledge that others like them have continued to succeed is important to convey.

For type E individuals, examples of poverty-reduction information products and services appropriate for each of these stages include:

- To build knowledge: community media, both print and broadcast, to provide information about available local resources.
- To persuade and support implementation: mentors, counselors and groups who are like the individuals or have a high degree of empathy.
- To confirm: confidentially convey successful strategies through community media and stipends to promote inclusion in community decision making.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, FowlerHoffman recommended that the Foundation's Community Connections program could best become a broker and supplier of information products and services on poverty reduction by first concentrating its resources on building the knowledge and awareness of poverty and how to reduce it, and second by identifying and supporting change agents within each of the audience types to become "champions" of poverty reduction. The combined results and recommendations from Phase I and Phase II research provided the Foundation with a blueprint for creating a Community Connections program that best leverages the Foundation's resources to help communities help themselves.