

From Assessment to Impact: Is United Way Working on the Right Things?

What Matters 2004 will be used by United Way to assess the appropriateness of the current critical need areas, goals and objectives. As part of the community input process, key informants and focus group participants were asked this question:

Over the last seven years, United Way has focused on seven critical need areas: Education, Employment, Health, Housing, Neighborhood Development, Safety and Race Relations/Diversity. Based on your understanding of the community role of United Way and what you have described in terms of the needs, trends and gaps in services, are these the right areas or are there any that you think need to be changed or added?

This section includes a summary of the responses to this question, as well as an overview of a literature review of alternative models for organizing community impact strategies.

Theme 1: Keep and/or Improve Current Structure

Most respondents generally agreed that the current critical need areas are appropriate as a framework, but there were many suggestions for ways to improve it.

| Response Category | Percent of Key Informants (n=50) (1) | # Focus Groups with this Comment (n=18) | Reasons/Comments |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Generally agree with the current list | 68% | 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They're broad enough to capture the issues. • UW has done a lot of work to find these areas. • Those are a lot on the mark. • Cost-benefit ratio of changing too high. |
| Need to further focus | 26% | 0 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven is probably too many. • How can UW be good in all these areas? • Some more critical than others. UW needs to prioritize. • Education, Employment, Health are keys to the others. |
| Current interpretation is too narrow | 8% | 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are the correct areas, but they have been too narrowly conceived. • "Education" really equals "early childhood"; "Health" equals "teen alcohol and drug use". • Do we have the luxury of focusing on such narrow areas? • Donors think all the needs in these broad areas are being addressed, and they're not. • Not flexible enough to address emerging issues. |
| Vision Councils operate as silos; need to interrelate | 12% | 9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CNAs need to address systemic needs. • Integration across CNAs is needed. • Unwind the emphasis areas to see where collaboration might be possible. • Need to do a better job of connecting the dots between areas of critical need for individuals. |

(1) Respondents could give multiple answers to a question

Theme 2: Comments about Existing Vision Councils

Some of the comments focused very specifically on an individual critical need area. Most of these comments were expressed by a relatively small number of individual interviewees and focus group participants (see “n” in each area). These comments are grouped below into three categories: 1) maintain current critical need area focus; 2) add to/enhance critical need area focus; and 3) decrease focus on the critical need area.

| Critical Need Area | Representative Comments | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| | Maintain Focus | Add to Focus | Decrease Focus |
| Education | Education is a high priority/huge issue/core issue (n=5) | n=0 | What can UW do in education?/I wonder what we have accomplished. (n=3) |
| Employment | Employment is important to focus on/all agencies should work together on employment/needs greater emphasis in the community (n=6) | n=0 | Employment should be a lower priority/not sure that employment is UW's "cup of tea" (n=2) |
| Health | Need to work harder on health/is important and inter-acts with variety of other targets (n=5) | Add emphasis area on health care and health access/ pay attention to environmental issues: lead paint; air/water quality/environmental justice (n=2) | Health would be lower priority (n=1) |
| Housing | Housing is an important issue/remains a top priority (n=3) | n=0 | Housing is more the responsibility of government/housing is taken care of by CSB/ housing should be lower priority (n=3) |
| Neighborhood Development | Neigh. Dev. high priority/ Neigh. Dev. will take care of safety (n=3) | It ought to include downtown development/should address issues of urban sprawl (n=2) | Neigh. Dev. is methodology for meeting the other five needs; delete as separate VC/more the responsibility of government/ can't see visible results as with direct services (n=5) |
| Race Relations/ Diversity | Making progress there/we appear to be doing a much better job on race and diversity/ critical priority/you have to work on this every day (n=7) | Include needs of refugees and immigrants/ increased emphasis on diversity as opposed to just race relations (n=3) | Talking about race relations and diversity without concrete programming doesn't get it done/ integrate with Neigh. Dev./can't separate from the other CNAs/ all areas need to be looked at through lens of race and diversity. (n=4) |
| Safety | Safety is critical/maintain focus (n=2) | Include needs of refugees and immigrants/ greater priority on family violence/ more visible presence as safety advocate/ deal with tensions between police and ethnic neighborhoods (n=4) | Incorporate safety within other categories/ should be part of Neigh. Dev. (n=4) |

n=Number of persons (interviewee and/or focus group participant) who made comments in this category

Theme 3: Ideas for New Vision Councils or Areas of Focus

The key informant interviews and focus groups generated a number of ideas for either new vision councils or new areas of focus for United Way's community impact activities. An "X" in following table indicates that an interviewee made a suggestion in the categories or that the category was mentioned in a focus group.

| Response Category | Mentioned by Key Informant | Mentioned in a Focus Group |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Populations/Individuals | | |
| • Families/relationships | | X |
| • Immigrants/New Americans | X | X |
| • Youth/Children | X | X |
| • Aging/Older adults | | X |
| • Ex-offenders | | X |
| • People in poverty | | X |
| Program/Policy Areas | | |
| • Basic needs/urgent needs | X | X |
| • Child care | X | X |
| • HIV/AIDS | | X |
| • Government and legislation | | X |
| • Community service | | X |
| • Transportation/access to services | X | X |
| • Mental health | | X |
| • Life skills | | X |
| • Asset building/financial responsibility | | X |
| • Legal services | | X |
| • Domestic violence | | X |
| • Organizational capacity building | | X |
| • Substance abuse | X | X |

(1) Respondents could give multiple answers to a question

Theme 4: Need for More Information

Thirteen of the 50 key informants indicated that they need additional information to determine if the current vision council structure is appropriate and effective. The following are some of the comments on this theme:

- I don't know enough about the progress in some of these areas.
- Not sure where the money is going. I like visible results more than theoretical results.
- I don't understand the difference between Housing and Neighborhood Development –or- Race Relations and Neighborhood Development.
- I don't know what United Way is doing in Safety and Employment.
- What is the exact need and issue identified in 1997 and is progress being made.

A Framework for Organizing Community Impact Strategies

In order to provide United Way with some alternative models for organizing its community impact work, Community Research Partners undertook a limited literature to identify models used by other communities, including other United Ways. These range from the current program/policy focus used by United Way of Central Ohio to models focusing on social well-being, civic health and regional progress.

Models for Organizing Indicators and Strategies

| Focus/Structure | Topics/Indicators | Examples |
|--|--|--|
| Community indicator policy/program topics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture/recreation • Education • Employment/economy • Race Relations/ Diversity/equity • Government/politics • Health • Housing • Human services • Natural environment • Neighborhood Development • Planning/land use • Population • Regional/community assets • Resource use • Safety • Society/social environment • Technology/information • Transportation/mobility | United Way of Central Ohio Sustainable Measures Buffalo-Niagara State of the Region Report Jacksonville, FL Quality of Life Indicators |

| Focus/Structure | Topics/Indicators | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Social well-being: Framed as descriptive topics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic needs/core services • Healthy for life • Stable, healthy families • Safe communities • Strong/healthy neighborhoods • Growing up, getting ready • Agency and volunteer development • Self-reliance and independence/self-sufficiency | United Way of Dane County United Way of Clark & Champaign Counties |
| Social well-being: Framed as activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurturing children and youth • Creating a brighter future for children and youth • Building stronger families and neighborhoods • Creating independence for elderly and disabled • Responding to personal crisis and disaster • Meeting basic needs • Promoting wellness and protecting our health | United Way of Central Indiana United Way of Greater Cincinnati Jacksonville Community Council |
| Social well-being: Framed as population outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families, youth and individuals are engaged in their community's decisions and activities • Pregnant women and young children thrive • Children are ready for school • Children succeed in school • Children live in stable, supported families • Youth choose healthy behaviors • Youth successfully transition to adulthood • Adults lead healthy and productive lives • Elders and people with disabilities live with dignity and independence in settings they prefer • Communities provide safety and support to families and individuals | Vermont's Framework for Collaboration |
| Civic health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community leadership • Government performance • Volunteerism/philanthropy • Intergroup relations • Civic education • Community information sharing • Community vision & pride • Capacity for cooperation and consensus | National Civic League, <i>Civic Index</i> |
| Regional progress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation & Entrepreneurship • Inclusion & Participation • Education & Lifelong Learning • Quality of Life • Regional Thinking & Action | Brookings Institution, <i>Potomac Index</i> |

