

Project/Program Profile

Name of Project/Program: Project B.L.I.S.S. (Building Links to Impact Self-sufficiency)

Organization: Community Action Partnership of Riverside County (CAP Riverside)

Location of Project/Program: 2038 Iowa Avenue, Suite B-102, Riverside County. Partners provide facilities to offer meetings, workshops and outreach throughout the county as needed.

Year Project Completed/Program Began Operation: 2004

Funding Sources: Community Services Block Grant

Populations Served: Low-income working families

Number of People Served: 95 families

Number of Staff: 2 – Project Manager and Coordinator

Total Cost of Development/Operation: Approximately \$200,000

Partners: Project B.L.I.S.S. partners primarily with 18 faith-based organizations and 2 School Districts to operate this program. Partners provide volunteers, meeting sites, meals for meetings, resources to assist families, mentoring/coaching, and advocacy.

Services Provided: 2-year family self-sufficiency program that provides life skills training, financial education, goal development and achievement strategies, coaching, mentoring, and cross-enrollment in asset/wealth-building programs like IDA and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

California Community Economic Development Exemplary Practices Project

SERVICES: Financial Education

(Italicized portions offer further explanation. If the standard is not fulfilled by the project, it is noted in the italicized explanation. Crossed-out portions are not applicable.)

Level 1: Program Feasibility Assessment

These basic criteria determine the feasibility of a financial education program. The focus is on the organizational and financial readiness of the program.

1. NEED

a. Community Need

- i. There is a population that is unbanked or underbanked.
 1. *Riverside County has a population that is unbanked.*
- ii. There is a population lacking financial education and information about financial services.
 1. *Riverside County has a population that lacks financial information.*

b. Market Study/Needs Analysis

CAP Riverside conducts a bi-annual needs assessment of low-income households countywide. The majority of respondents consistently indicate that family self-sufficiency, along with asset/wealth building, skills and strategies are desirable pathways out of poverty.

- i. The market study confirms the need for, and viability of the program.
 1. There are no other financial education programs in the area that can work with the target population.
 2. There is enough demand for services and sources of funding to support the program.
 - a. *In 2002, a national organization, Move the Mountain introduced the format of Circles of Support which evolved into Circles™. CAP Riverside knew of the need for support for working poor families due to the demand for other services provided by CAP Riverside. Since its pilot run in 2004, the program has increased in demand, growing from 4 families to 95 families serving all 5 supervisorial districts of Riverside County.*
 - b. *Participating low-income families and their middle-income “allies” are recruited from the congregations of faith-based communities that have partnered with CAP Riverside.*

- ii. The market study informs the organization about demographics of the area, competition, and barriers to entry.

1. *The program serves working poor families.*

c. Local Support

- i. The beneficiaries of the program support the program.
- ii. Neighbors and local community members support the program.
 1. *The program benefits from local community volunteers who participate in the program as “allies” to help guide the participants.*
- iii. The program is in alignment with local city, county, state and/or federal development goal(s)

2. ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

- a. The organization is willing and able to do the program.
- b. The program is in alignment with the mission of the organization.
 - i. *The organization’s mission is to end poverty, and this program helps working poor families ensure their economic security.*

- c. The Board of Directors embraces a CED strategy and/or embraces the program as a part of the CED strategy.
 - d. The organization and/or its partners have a track record of participating in similar programs.
 - i. *The organization has successfully run financial education programs, mentoring programs, asset building programs, family self-sufficiency programs.*
 - e. The organization has the financial and operational capacity to undertake the proposed program.
 - ~~i. The organization can support the additional debt (if any) created by the program.~~
 - 1. *The program does not create debt.*
 - ii. The organization has qualified staff that can undertake the program.
 - iii. The organization has access to reliable, qualified vendors and service providers.
3. FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY
- a. Program cost
 - i. The program is affordable to the organization, and the projected cost is appropriate to the concept.
 - 1. *The costs of the program are primarily for office costs and salaries. The meeting site, which would be the primary cost, is donated by partners.*
 - ii. The operator or staff providing the cost estimates is qualified and experienced with financial education programs.
 - b. Funding sources
 - i. There are enough sources of funding for the uses.
 - 1. *Costs are covered by Community Services Block Grant funding, and other costs are donated by partners, volunteers, and community supporters.*
 - ii. The organization has endeavored to secure all available competitive and noncompetitive funding sources for which the program qualifies.
 - iii. The actual disbursement of each source is timely and in sync with the needs of the program.
 - iv. The organization is aware of the compliance implications of each source.
 - c. Cash flow
 - ~~i. The program produces enough cash flow to support the proposed debt structure (if any).~~
 - 1. *There is not debt created by the program.*
 - ii. If the program is low-cost or free, it is subsidized enough to sustain itself beyond the first year.
 - 1. *The program is free for participants, but they must income qualify.*

Level 2: Practical Considerations

These criteria are essential for a successful, operating financial education program.

1. MARKET BARRIERS

- a. The organization understands why past programs have not worked and instead addresses prior issues in innovative and alternative ways.

2. DEVELOPMENT TEAM & PARTNERSHIPS

- a. The organization has assembled the best team for the program, including vendors, employees, trainers, outreach coordinators, and management staff.
- b. If the organization is lacking in any area (financial, experience), it has partnered with another entity to operate the program.
 - i. *The organization has partnered with 18 faith-based communities that recruit allies from their congregations to volunteer for at least 12 months. Allies provide guidance*

to the working poor families who have identified their goals. The faith-based communities approach working poor families in their congregations to participate in the program. CAP Riverside provides training and technical assistance to these partners to run and grow the Circles, so they can be independent of CAP Riverside.

- c. The program is supported by public sector, private sector, and community partners.
 - d. Through an open dialogue with the community, the organization has sought and incorporated community participation in the program
3. SITE CHARACTERISTICS
- a. The area that is served by the program makes sense.
 - i. *The program serves all of Riverside County.*
 - ~~b. The offices and training sites of the program are located near or adjacent to transit.~~
 - i. *The program is offered at the faith-based community that recruits the family.*
4. PROGRAM DESIGN & OPERATION
- a. The program is run in the appropriate language(s) for the clientele in the area.
 - i. *The program is offered in English and Spanish, depending on the congregation.*
 - b. The program is culturally appropriate to the clientele in the area.
 - c. The program is tailored to the specific geography of the clientele in the area.

Level 3: From Feasible to Exemplary

These criteria elevate a financial education program to an exemplary program.

1. FUNDING & FUNDING REQUIREMENTS
- a. The program uses a funding program or funding source that is new and innovative.
 - b. Each funding source was heavily leveraged to gain further resources.
 - c. Certain features of the program were adapted to capture funding, but the program was not completely changed in order to capture one particular funding source.
 - d. There are multiple stakeholders providing funding, and this mix of funding sources maximizes the feasibility of the program.
 - i. *There is only one funding source, which is leveraged with support from partners, volunteers, and community supporters.*
 - e. The program exceeds minimum standards required by funding sources.
 - i. There is deeper low and moderate income targeting than required by funding sources.
2. FUTURE PROJECTS
- a. The program strengthens the position (financial, political, capacity, experience) of the organization.
 - b. Through the program, the reputation of the organization was enhanced. Issues that the staff faced were dealt with in a diplomatic manner, enabling future programs.
 - c. The success of the program will enable future funding on other programs.
 - d. The community is happy with the program and will participate in more/similar programs in the future.
 - e. The community is more knowledgeable about financial education programs.
3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
- a. The program has less environmental impact than traditional programs during operation.
 - i. *The environmental impact of this program is undetermined.*
 - b. The program stimulates green job creation.
 - i. *The program does not stimulate green job creation.*
4. ECONOMIC IMPACT
- a. The program attracts new businesses to the area.

- i. Depending on the goals set by the families, the program can attract new businesses to the area. Participants are cross-enrolled into the IDA program which has a matched-savings goal of business ownership.*
 - b. The program helps retain existing businesses.
 - i. Depending on the goals set by the families, the program can retain existing businesses.*
 - c. The program improves matching of employees with employers.
 - i. The allies can provide support and direction to those looking for employment. However, the allies point them in the right direction, but do not find the employers for them.*
 - d. The program encourages development, redevelopment, and investment.
 - i. The program encourages participants to first save and then invest.*
- 5. COMPREHENSIVENESS
 - a. The organization provides or connects to other programs that provide multiple services e.g. social services.
 - i. The organization promotes cross-enrollment to other services it provides, especially the IDA program.*
 - ii. The organization views cross-enrollment as one of its key strategies.*
- 6. DIVERSITY
 - a. The program serves a mixed income clientele.
 - i. The program involves both low-income and middle-income families.*
 - b. The program encourages mixed age, gender, ethnic, etc. participation.
 - c. The program supports minority businesses.
 - i. The program can help participants with their new or existing businesses. Since many program participants are minorities, the program supports minority businesses.*
- 7. PUBLIC BENEFITS
 - a. The program provides financial education that is needed by the community but is currently not provided or accessible.
 - b. The program results in other positive economic impacts.
 - i. The program provides support for families to improve their economic statuses.*
 - c. The program results in other positive social impacts.
 - i. The program stimulates cross-socio-economic mixing, which improves tolerance and community relations.*
- 8. LONGITUDINAL DATA
 - a. The program tracks financial indicators of its participants (e.g. # of participants who have gone on to open savings accounts)
 - i. Basic demographic information and financial information such as current employment income and savings balance are collected at the start of the program.*
 - ii. The organization tracks the changes in assets quarterly.*
 - iii. The organization tracks the financial benefits of the program, such as if participants gain better paying jobs or begin to earn living wages.*
 - iv. The organization also tracks what mechanisms such as case management, coaching, etc. affected the above changes.*
 - v. Even if some families do not complete the full 2 years of the program, the organization takes note of successes along the way. Results are scaled so that the organization can evaluate and improve the program.*
- 9. REPLICABLE/SCALABLE
 - a. This program can be replicated in other communities, regions, and/or states.