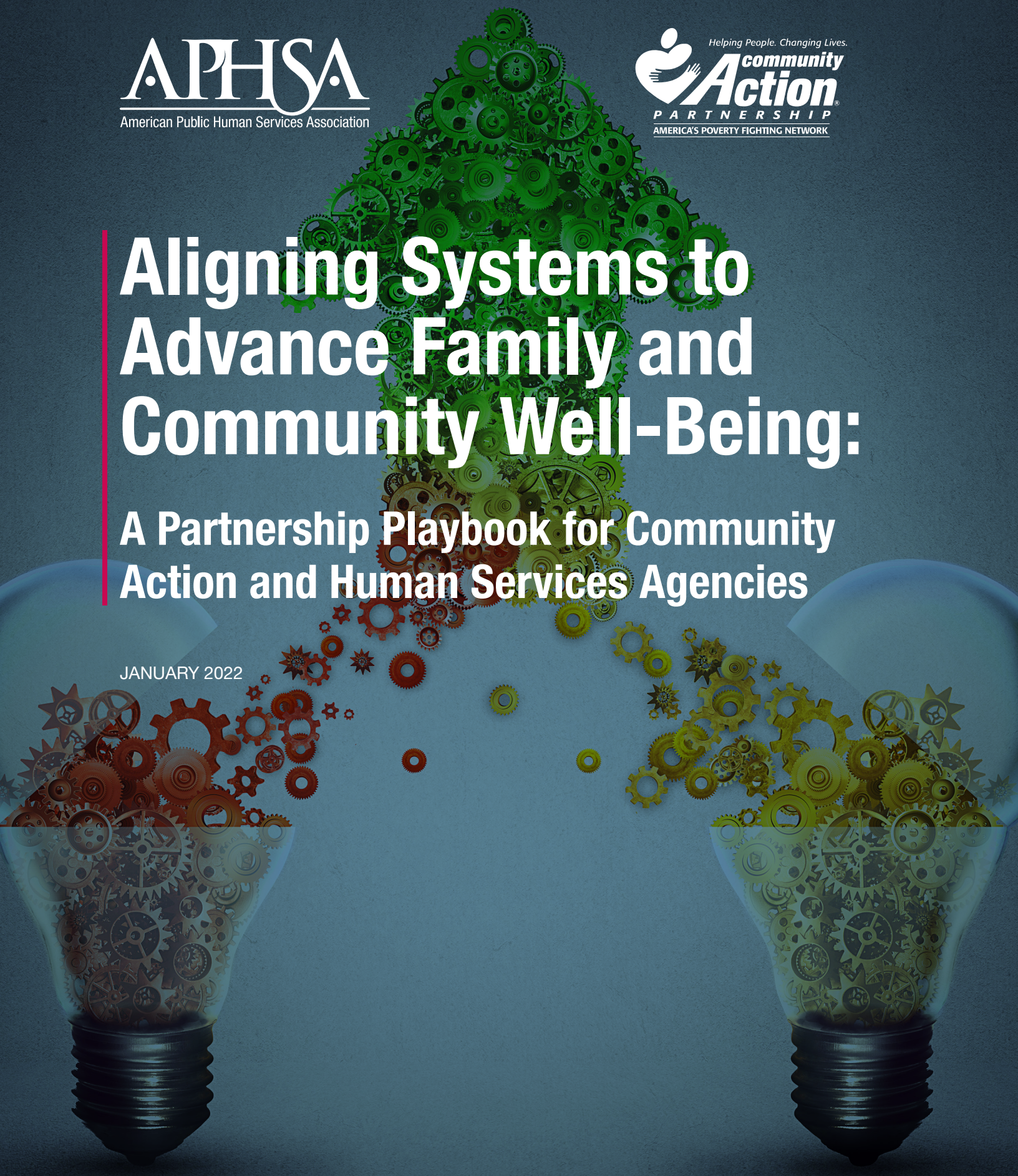
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Aligning Systems to Advance Family and Community Well-Being:

A Partnership Playbook for Community Action and Human Services Agencies

JANUARY 2022





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Welcome to this Playbook,

a shared exploration of the ways our two systems have partnered together in recent times in response to the public health and economic crisis of COVID-19, and continue to move forward promising collaborative work focused on thriving families. Our nation's public human services system and the network of Community Action Agencies have different origin stories and histories, but we share a common vision—our desired future state—coupled with shared values that guide our work and a deep commitment to impact.

In this playbook you will have the opportunity to learn about the ways Community Action and human services agencies worked together to meet the pandemic challenge—what worked well, obstacles and difficulties, and lessons learned to inform our path forward, partnering to achieve a more equitable recovery. You will also explore how communities have leveraged opportunities to partner on approaches that hold the promise of deeper, longer lasting changes for families—work shaped by families' wishes and strengths and designed to advance both family-level and systems-level change.

In these pages you will meet and learn from colleagues, some working in strategic partnership to provide whole family supports, some to provide customized services and supports that make career pathways possible for SNAP recipients, and others whose work illustrates how we can partner to tackle structural inequities in accessing services. It is our hope that this Playbook will provide you with a view into the enormous potential that exists when you explore partnering together across systems and structures. As your national associations, we have found these synergies to be real and to hold great potential as we move toward an even closer alignment in the future.



Tracy Wareing Evans
President & CEO
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CEO
National Community Action Partnership

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Introduction

To build well-being from the ground up, we must foster vibrant communities where everyone can live, learn, work, play, and connect — creating the enabling conditions where people can reach their potential. Achieving this vision calls for the public sector and community organizations to come together to co-create solutions, side-by-side with the people we serve, that prevent problems before they occur and address root causes of community-level challenges — and much work remains to be done to achieve this vision equitably and for all. While the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed where our systems are stretched and frayed, it also foregrounded the *interconnectedness* of the foundational supports that all people and communities need to thrive.

At our best during the COVID-19 pandemic, this vision was reflected in the rapid adaptations and coordination of the public and non-profit sectors to simultaneously support the economic, physical, social, and emotional well-being of families whose lives were disrupted by the sudden public health crisis. Yet, the on-going disparities in our COVID-19 response and recovery highlight the progress we still need to achieve to build more equitable and resilient communities.

A Partnership Playbook for Community Action and Human Services Agencies

At the center of efforts to build a system of supports that assist people and communities through crisis are public human services and Community Action Agencies. Collectively, these entities provide a wide range of services that:

- promote opportunities to earn family sustaining wages and accumulate savings;
- provide access to quality early childhood education;
- assure food and housing security;
- connect people to support systems that reduce stress, and much more.

Community Action Agencies often administer these services as contracted partners of state or local human services agencies. Other times, each agency administers standalone services that are highly complementary of each other in meeting whole family needs.

Community Action Agencies are local private nonprofit and public agencies that work to ensure the causes and conditions of poverty are effectively addressed. **Human services agencies** are state and local agencies that administer government-funded services that support the health and well-being of people and communities.

Together, these agencies are responsible for a wide range of economic assistance and child and family well-being services that help families, and the communities where they live, to thrive and reach their potential.

Aligned Services Offered

Community Action	Human Services
✓ CSBG	✓ SNAP
✓ Head Start/ Early Head Start	✓ Cash Assistance (TANF)
✓ Energy Assistance	✓ Employment and Training
✓ Weatherization	✓ Child Welfare
✓ Healthy Homes	✓ Child Care
✓ Employment and Training	✓ Medicaid
✓ Housing Assistance	✓ LIHEAP
✓ Financial Literacy	✓ Refugee Resettlement
✓ Senior Services	✓ Child Support
✓ Food Assistance	✓ Food Distribution
✓ Improved Well-being Case Management Programs	✓ Adult Services

In this Partnership Playbook, we explore how Community Action and human services agencies have worked together during the COVID-19 pandemic response and what opportunities lie ahead to catalyze stronger connections to support the well-being of communities. Drawing on examples from the field, the Partnership Playbook elevates promising areas of alignment between the two networks that can be deployed to maximize the impact of the CARES Act, American Rescue Plan Act, and other federal investments intended to support a strong and equitable recovery. The Playbook additionally explores where, despite their shared purpose and vision, more work is needed to transform the way human services and Community Action Agencies work together to help communities reach their potential.

The Human Services Value Curve: A Framework to Measure Alignment

As we explore the ways in which human services and Community Action Agencies are working together towards our shared vision and are striving to identify ways we can achieve more impactful, transformational change together, we can use tested tools to better understand the degree to which our systems are working in alignment. The *Human Services Value Curve* (or "Value Curve" for short) is a four-stage roadmap for improving health and human services outcomes. Looking at what we do from the point of view of the family/service participant, the Value Curve describes how services are delivered at four progressive stages of value, each building off the prior stage.

The Human Services Value Curve

Regulative — achieving program compliance

Collaborative — working across programs towards "one door" for families

Integrative — examining root causes of problems and customizing solutions

Generative — co-creating capacity and broader solutions leading to healthy communities

Using the lens of the Value Curve, we can look at the extent to which human services and Community Action Agencies are strategically aligning to achieve shared outcomes. Alignment can occur at multiple stages of the Value Curve simultaneously and plays a critical role in transforming services to be centered on people and communities.

Using the Value Curve to Examine Human Services and Community Action Agency Alignment



At the **Regulative stage**, a human services agency may contract with a Community Action Agency to administer a program in a way that maintains compliance and promotes effective service delivery.



At the **Collaborative stage**, a human services agency and Community Action Agency work together to improve cross-programmatic effectiveness, including implementing operational changes that remove barriers to accessing the full array of services people need to achieve well-being.



At the **Integrative stage**, a human services agency and Community Action Agency transform casework practice through family engagement and service flexibility, moving towards early intervention and prevention. Utilizing technology, data sharing, and adaptive program design and funding mechanisms are crucial elements of this transformation. Often times this work occurs with the involvement of additional state, local, and community-based partners.



At the **Generative stage**, a human services agency and Community Action Agency are focused on co-creating a health and well-being system that meets family/service participants capacity needs while proactively addressing community-level needs and generating systemic, long-term impacts.

This Playbook features examples of the kinds of human services — Community Action Agency partnerships that represent real progression toward true generativity — in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and in working in alignment on several other significant social and economic barriers to health, well-being and social and economic mobility.

Opportunity for Alignment: Whole Family Supports

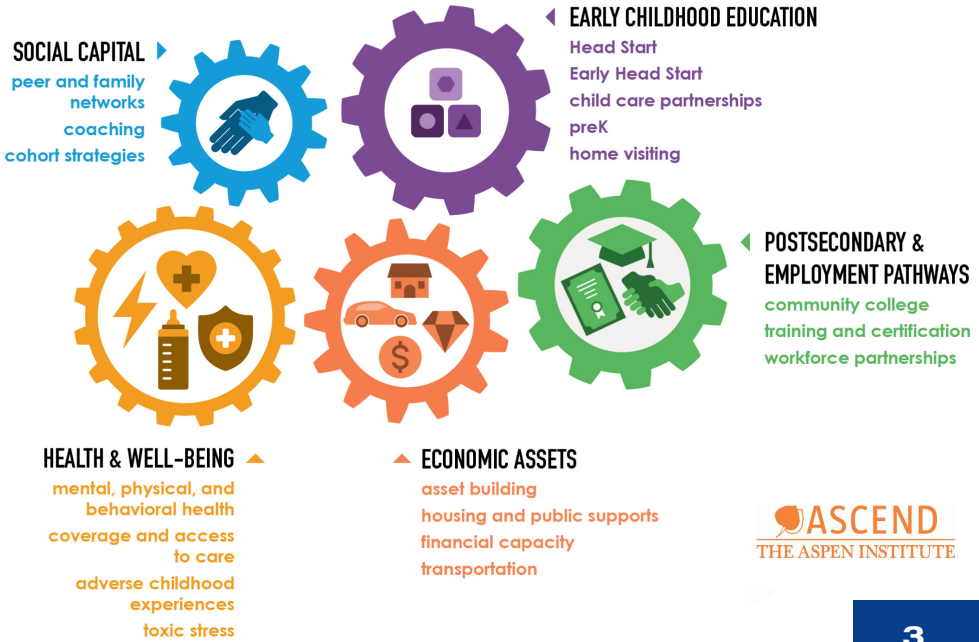
Because generative partnerships hold great promise for breaking down silos and achieving better outcomes, communities are using new, more holistic practice models that go beyond addressing one need at a time in different places. When it comes to working with families experiencing low income, a holistic approach is very important. Whole Family (also known as 2-generation or 2-Gen) supports moving beyond the need for adults to navigate multiple doors to access services and treats children and their parents or caregivers as interconnected, acknowledging and building on their collective family strengths.

A hallmark of all whole family approaches is intentional engagement with children and the adults in their lives *together*. While human services and Community Action Agencies have historically administered many programs that focused solely on the parent *or* the child, whole family approaches start from the premise that the well-being of all family members is interconnected and that families are the best architects of their desired future. Program staff work with families as co-designers, taking stock of the family as a whole and looking at different pathways to achieving greater well-being.



Designing that pathway involves thinking in terms of the kinds of supports that enable families to thrive.

Looking at the key components of a whole family approach, it is immediately clear that many or most of the services and supports are available through the human services and Community Action networks, from Head Start/early learning to economic supports, workforce programs and many others. For communities to offer whole family supports that bridge and span programs and agencies, our two systems are essential to any effective partnership effort. Featured below are profiles of two national exemplars of two-generation/whole family work where public sector human services leaders and Community Action Agency leaders have been at the forefront of statewide or regional efforts, seeking to align their efforts and build



on their respective strengths and capabilities. Both the Community Action and the human services networks have made significant strides in advancing whole family supports; including efforts led by the National Community Action Partnership and American Public Human Services Association.



Aligning in Crisis: the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Responding to the pandemic and the ensuing challenges foregrounded the importance of whole family approaches in good times and bad. Disruptions to in-person schooling, from early learning through K-12, had an outsized impact on both parents and their children. While many adults are thought of by their employers and by policymakers as workers and breadwinners, they are also caregivers. The policy and practice decisions that impacted them in terms of their employment also impacted their ability to provide care for their children, who were experiencing physical, emotional and social stressors along with learning challenges because of the impact of COVID-19. The interconnectedness of family members has never been clearer.



Strengthening Alignment for an Equitable Recovery

Just as the pandemic shined a light on the interconnectedness of families, it also laid bare the profoundly disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, including communities of color. COVID-19 infection rates and deaths hit communities of color particularly hard, as a large proportion of essential workers in many parts of the country are people of color, many of them parents whose families have been adversely impacted. Also important in understanding this disproportionality is the well-documented negative health outcomes and shortened life expectancy experienced in communities whose well-being has been impacted by the stressors of the inequities resulting from systemic and structural racism. As each network works to center race equity and whole family approaches in all areas of work, a strategically aligned effort in ongoing pandemic recovery is an important opportunity for significant impact.



Whole Family Supports Examples from the Field: Western Maryland



Partnership Overview

Although today Garrett County and Allegany County in rural Western Maryland are recognized as national leaders in advancing effective 2Gen-Whole Family approaches, that work emerged even before the current appreciation of this model was widespread. Garrett County Community Action Committee's strategic planning work, which involved the county Department of Social Services (DSS) Director, pointed toward a greater focus on integrating services within and across the two systems to achieve greater success with family-generated pathway improvement plans and aspirations leading to corresponding positive outcomes for families. Leadership from Allegany County Human Resources Development Commission, Inc. (HRDC) took a lesson from the powerful outcomes achieved by Head Start, noting that early childhood gains were not enough to end the multigenerational experience of poverty because those services were focused only on young children and not on providing holistic services and supports for the whole family, including housing, health and mental health and social connections. In both counties, planning work revealed that a large majority of customers were being served by the public human services and Community Action systems, foregrounding the importance of both integration and eliminating duplication to maximize resources. Both Community Action Agencies engaged with state DSS leadership and drew attention to the power of the approach, resulting in a collaborative effort to create a statewide 2Gen pilot program that builds out and draws lessons learned from the Western Maryland model.



Aligning in Crisis: the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

During the early days of pandemic response, providers struggled to provide core services — the required technology infrastructure for virtual service delivery was not in place, and so this was the focus. Communications with other agencies suffered very early on in the pandemic not because its value was forgotten but because of the realities of operating in crisis mode. Today, agency leaders see much promise in the use of Zoom and other virtual platforms to communicate more easily and to facilitate meetings of staff and for virtual team meetings with families.

> We're in a rural community where we all depend on each other. Here in Garrett County there is a culture of collaboration among providers that has helped make coordination during the pandemic happen more quickly and easily.
>
> *Duane Yoder*
> *Garrett Community Action Committee*

While funding for COVID response has been powerfully positive in its impact in many ways, the need to quickly move dollars — for example, rental assistance — to meet urgent customer needs often made it impossible to develop an assessment, a family plan, or a bundling of services.

On the other hand, guidance provided from the state Department of Housing and Community Development enabled DSS and the Allegany County HRDC Community Action Agency to house people experiencing homelessness much more rapidly. Flexibilities provided during COVID also made it possible to work with customers in a variety of new, innovative ways (virtual, out in the community) and allowed a range of partners to provide documentation electronically.

Strengthening Alignment for an Equitable Recovery

In these rural counties, both transportation and broadband access are perennial major challenges that create inequities in access to services and supports. During the pandemic, Community Action Agencies and DSS deployed hot spots that run off cell towers and Echo devices to enable older people to address social isolation. Allegany HRDC opened Head Start centers in the evening and after hours to facilitate internet access and did home visits to program participants (adhering to health protocols). The Garrett County Community Action Committee is now installing free internet access in its housing development and community centers. Schools were vitally important, playing an outsized role in getting technology to families. Going forward, the fact that virtual service delivery proved effective, efficient, and was a positive approach from participants' perspectives suggests that advocating together to improve broadband access is a promising area for strategically aligned action, building on the learnings from the pandemic to advance equitable access.

> "What I think is important is that we are committed to continuing to advance on that human service value curve and that we all see our role as partners [as] very important in that process"
>
> *Courtney Thomas*
> *Winterberg Allegany County Department of Social Services*

Leadership	Cultivating workforce cultures of working across systems is a key success factor Counties and region share a community culture of collaboration across systems and sectors
Service Delivery	Co-location of services and use of common data sharing and intake platform Staff training and practice changes bring challenges of navigating systems into focus and support customers in enhanced self confidence and self advocacy skill building
Advancing Equity	Broadband access key to service provision in rural counties Providing hotspots and opening offices during nonbusiness hours to enable internet access

Western Maryland Two-Generation Model through the Human Services Value Curve Lens



In Western Maryland, DSS and the Garrett County and Allegany County Community Action Agencies most often work at the integrative stage, though there continues to be movement across stages depending on external circumstances, most notably, a regulative focus during COVID-19. Practice changes include centering families in assessment, services design, outcomes and customization. The work involves additional state, local, and community-based partners, including community colleges, health departments and leadership from the state legislature in ensuring the creation of a 2Gen Commission and the provision of new data sharing and common intake capabilities via the state's Maryland Total Human-services Integrated Network (MD THINK).

Whole Family Supports Examples from the Field: Virginia 2-Gen Pilots

Partnership Overview

Several years ago, the State of Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS) accelerated the movement of the agency's goals beyond regulatory program compliance toward participant outcomes, while the Virginia Community Action Partnership (VACAP) was adopting Organizational Standards for member Community Action Agencies. The two systems already had a strong working relationship and partnership, and discussions began early on about the potential of adopting a 2Gen/Whole Family approach. Community Action Agency leaders met at least quarterly with the Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS) Commissioner, who has had a long-standing interest in whole family approaches, and so leaders of both networks developed the concept of seeking to utilize TANF dollars to fund a long-term, 5-year project with a limited number of Community Action Agencies competing for 2Gen grants. With leadership from VACAP, the initiative received buy-in from the General Assembly and the Governor in 2019, resulting in a $1.125 million competitive grant program to Community Action Agencies for 2Gen/whole family pilots. Pilot sites were expected to implement approaches that involve tight alignment across these systems, easing navigation and putting families at the center, among them the use of family coaches, adoption of a common data collection and outcome tracking system, and cross-site evaluation.

> We consider the Community Action Agency is part of the [state] agency, to be honest — it's like they are equal with the local DSS... The conversation for years had been about the switch from service delivery to outcomes, and an overall concept of that being something that we were discussing in the DSS realm, and also having a conversation in the Community Action network at the same time.
>
> *Matt Fitzgerald*
> *Virginia Department of Social Services*

Participation in the 2Gen pilot program accelerated Community Action Agencies' efforts to address the inefficiency of delivering services through multiple separate, unlinked databases. Establishing a uniform database across entire agencies broke down systemic silos and now facilitates intensive case management and comprehensive services at multiple points of entry, operationalizing a "no wrong door" policy and allowing the agency to develop new assessment tools and coaching models.

Aligning in Crisis: the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

For some Community Action Agency pilot sites, serving a dispersed rural area made the universal need to pivot to the use of technology in the early days of the COVID-19 response even more acute. CARES Act funding later enabled the purchase of additional equipment which in turn made it possible for pilot sites to deliver family coaching virtually. The strong pre-existing relationships with DSS were essential to navigate service delivery amid the pandemic, and the design of the pilot program, which had already established a cohort model where family coaches from DSS and Community Action Agencies meet on a regular basis, made it possible to exchange information and identify the holes in service delivery that needed filling. For example, the pilot program run by the Hampton Roads Area Community Action Program (HRCAP) agency determined that participants frequently had significant experiences of trauma, prompting the organization to provide trauma-informed care, particularly for underserved populations, establishing virtual peer support group meetings as well as remote individual and group counseling sessions. The agency used technology and COVID-related flexibility in administrative rules to cut through existing regulations and ensure that families could enroll in pilot-funded services and complete assessments virtually.

Strengthening Alignment for an Equitable Recovery

While the pandemic has posed significant challenges in service delivery for both human services and Community Action Agencies, it has also provided some opportunities to re-imagine cross sector alignment. Leadership at VACAP and DSS envision providing training and technical assistance for joint capacity building beyond COVID by focusing on three areas: fund development and fundraising, strategic and crisis communications, and risk assessment and business continuity. During the pandemic response another national tragedy catalyzed these partners to think and act strategically. In the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd, the VACAP network mobilized and began to think with VA DSS about launching a new pilot program, this time on criminal justice diversion. Together, the two networks have taken on new challenges even as they navigate the numerous roadblocks of delivering services during the pandemic.

Leadership	Building trust among network leaders over time, with frequent contact and conferral
Service Delivery	Implementing a single uniform database enabled agencies to more effectively deliver whole family approaches A cohort model with regular communication and shared learning makes rapid response to emerging needs possible
Advancing Equity	In rural areas the challenge of follow up on referrals is eased with the use of technology-enabled centralized intake process

Virginia Two-Generation Model through the Human Services Value Curve Lens





In Virginia, DSS, VACAP, and local Community Action Agencies historically and currently work at the integrative stage, though the degree of integration with county (vs. state) DSS agencies varies by area or jurisdiction. The partners' whole family work has led leaders to examine root causes and customize solutions — for example identifying disproportionate levels of trauma among families in underserved communities and customizing solutions. The partners' joint rapid response to the George Floyd tragedy, advancing a new pilot program addressing criminal justice diversion, represents an example of movement into the generative space, co-creating capacity and broader solutions leading to healthy communities.



Opportunity for Alignment: SNAP Employment & Training

Through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), human services agencies help more than 40 million people every year access healthy and desirable foods that support their well-being. A critical and rapidly growing component of SNAP, the SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) program helps people receiving assistance develop skills and access the supportive services needed to achieve economic mobility through family-sustaining wages.

To implement SNAP E&T, human services agencies rely on community partners (referred to as "third-party providers"). Through these third-party providers, SNAP E&T participants can receive a wide range of employment and training services — such as job coaching, work experience, and professional skills development — in addition to supportive services that eliminate barriers such as child care, transportation assistance, case management, and more. Given the extensive work already being done by Community Action Agencies to support the social and economic needs of people experiencing poverty, Community Action Agencies make for natural third-party providers to leverage and build upon existing services to utilize SNAP E&T funding to further their mission.

Community Action Agencies interested in becoming third-party providers can work with their human services agency partners to build the organizational capacity needed to develop, implement, and grow a SNAP E&T program. Recently, specific support and technical assistance has been deployed via webinars and FAQs to help Community Action Agencies interested in becoming a third-party partner. Agencies interested in exploring how SNAP E&T is administered in partnership with third-party providers can learn more about third-party provider models in 18 states through the SNAP E&T State Information Guide or hear directly from other providers about SNAP E&T Success Stories.



Aligning in Crisis: the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

The public health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have continued to impact the ways in which states and their third-party providers engage SNAP recipients through SNAP E&T. The sudden shift to virtual services forced agencies to rapidly adapt how they provide employment and training and supportive services while remaining responsive to broader disruptions in job markets. The challenges maintaining connection to people in the community has further reinforced the importance of tapping trusted, community-based partners such as Community Action Agencies to make SNAP E&T services available in ways that are needed. Moreover, the potential funding available through SNAP E&T provides an opportunity for Community Action Agencies to expand and build upon their existing array of services to help families impacted by the pandemic.



Strengthening Alignment for an Equitable Recovery

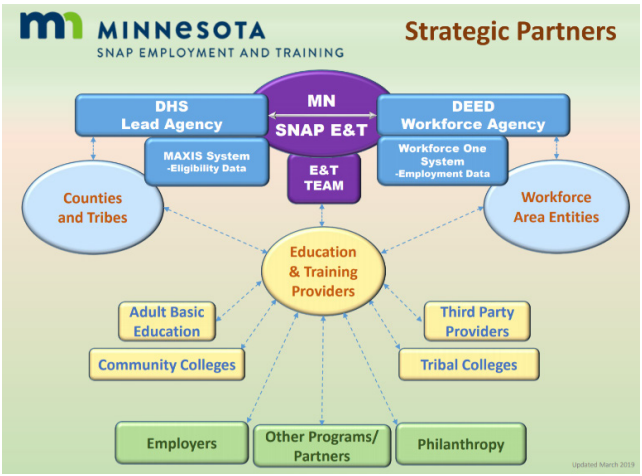
As our nation grapples with disparities in our economic recovery and longstanding systemic inequities that obstruct pathways to upward mobility, SNAP E&T plays an important role in connecting underserved communities with the foundational supports needed to thrive. However, in many states SNAP E&T remains in its early development as human services agencies increase their reach through onboarding new third-party providers. Community Action Agencies play a pivotal role in supporting the equitable expansion of SNAP E&T, connecting the program with communities of color, immigrant communities, rural areas, and other locations where people have faced longstanding barriers to economic opportunity.

SNAP Employment & Training Examples from the Field: Minnesota DHS and Tri-CAP

Partnership Overview

Minnesota's Department of Human Services (DHS) is currently implementing its five-year strategic plan to grow its SNAP E&T program to create clear pathways for Minnesotans with low-incomes to develop marketable and in-demand skills that lead to career advancement. Shifting away from a county-administered SNAP E&T model that leaned heavily on their state Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), DHS has launched a targeted effort to build a network of third-party providers equipped to serve the state's diverse population.

As a contracted SNAP outreach partner with DHS and displaced homemaker grantee with DEED, Tri-CAP — a Community Action Agency serving central Minnesota — was a natural partner to support DHS' strategy and became a SNAP E&T third party partner in 2018. The deep and longstanding public/private partnership between the organizations was critical to their ultimate success; both organizations point to their shared trust and communication as essential to overcoming the early challenges faced to successfully stand-up and integrate SNAP E&T into Tri-CAP's suite of services.



For Tri-CAP, sorting out how to overcome programmatic and operational silos to effectively blend SNAP E&T services into the agency's business model was a key obstacle to work through. Managing a broad spectrum of services — such as energy assistance, weatherization, transportation, and family resources — the agency sought to deploy SNAP E&T as a resource to meet families where they are no matter their point of entry. A critical enabling factor to do so was the agency's development of a common assessment system to screen people for SNAP E&T services. This tool, however, went beyond just assessment. Working in close consultation with DHS, Tri-CAP integrated its assessment into its financial management system, automating much of the process to expense eligible activities towards SNAP E&T, meet mandatory reporting requirements, and claim SNAP E&T reimbursement.

> "It takes time for providers to get E&T programs off the ground running. It's a big administrative lift and a different fiscal model than almost any other program. But we make a commitment to stick with our providers and help position them to succeed for the long-term."
>
> *Anastasia Polda*
> *SNAP E&T Supervisor, Minnesota Department of Human Services*

Minnesota DHS has prioritized building a culture of collaboration and support to build capacity and strengthen SNAP E&T implementation for Tri-CAP and its network of additional third-party providers. Through monthly coordination meetings with partners and a monitoring approach that prioritizes technical support and finding opportunities for growth and

innovation, the agency has fostered positive relationships that have helped lead to continuous quality improvement in the network. Both agencies note that the closely shared missions between human services and Community Action have helped shape the relationship to be a true partnership.



Aligning in Crisis: the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

In some ways, the COVID-19 pandemic has helped Minnesota DHS be a stronger partner and provide better support for Tri-CAP and other third-party providers. The culture shift to virtual meetings has allowed agency staff to provide more attention to providers outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Further, the strategic shift from a SNAP E&T model focused primarily on workforce system partnerships to one that blends in community-based partners to the provider network has made the program more resilient. Whereas providers exclusively offering direct, in person job training services had limited flexibility to pivot in their service delivery, more holistic and family-centered agencies such as Tri-CAP were able to continue to engage SNAP E&T recipients in different ways. With that said, both DHS and Tri-CAP acknowledged the challenge of identifying and engaging families as a result of less in person interaction with families is still being resolved.



Strengthening Alignment for an Equitable Recovery

As Minnesota DHS seeks to leverage SNAP E&T to support an equitable economic recovery, the State is closely attuned to the importance of advancing systems that create meaningful opportunity for people of all experiences and skill sets. Recognizing the potential for prioritizing services to individuals who are "work ready" and potentially easier to move through the program — DHS has increased its commitment to work with partners such as Tri-CAP that can engage hard-to-reach communities with needed and culturally competent services. Despite this focus, challenges still remain, particularly in rural areas where a lack of provider capacity makes it difficult to build inroads in these communities.

For Tri-CAP, the agency believes they have gained tremendous insight through virtual service delivery and the flexibilities afforded by amended administrative rules and increased resources to address people's unmet needs. These changes allowed Tri-CAP to engage an entirely new part of the community that is asset limited, income constrained, and employed (ALICE) that is often one crisis away from falling deeper into poverty. Going forward, Tri-CAP hopes to continue reaching this population and help support them on a path towards upward mobility.

> We had a lot to learn when we first started doing SNAP E&T. It took time to really maximize the benefits and serve more people. Partnering with [Minnesota] DHS was critical to our ultimate success bringing this fabulous program to our community.
>
> *Lori Schultz*
> *Executive Director, Tri-Cap*

	Leadership	Creating a culture of transparency and support to build capacity and resolve issues in SNAP E&T implementation
	Service Delivery	Integration of SNAP E&T assessment and reporting measures throughout Tri-CAP's functions routinized coordination between state and third party providers
	Advancing Equity	Targeting community-based providers able to engage underserved communities

Minnesota SNAP E&T through the Human Services Value Curve Lens





The partnership between Minnesota DHS and Tri-CAP reflects human services value curve progression from a longstanding collaborative working relationship toward an integrative partnership. Building on their track record of trust building and close communication, the agencies worked through barriers to ensure that families who might be served by SNAP E&T have a "no wrong door" experience at Tri-CAP. Innovative technology solutions like a common assessment system that was also integrated with the Tri-CAP financial management platform simplified the logistics needed to support the work and overcome difficulties that could limit the agency's success as a provider. MN DHS has worked to move from a traditional contractor model to engaging Tri-CAP and other SNAP E&T providers in a close working relationship that supports innovation through technical assistance and mutual support, signs of an integrative approach to the work.

SNAP Employment & Training Examples from the Field: Oregon DHS and Community Services Consortium

Partnership Overview

Over the past eight years, the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) has rapidly scaled its SNAP E&T program — referred to as "STEP" — from an initial $250,000 investment into a $60-$70 million annual program with a broad network of community colleges, Community Action Agencies, and other third-party providers. Housed within the state's Self-Sufficiency Programs, Oregon has sought to align STEP with its TANF-funded JOBS program to offer a continuum of employment and training services paired with economic supports that help stabilize families and provide them opportunities for upward mobility.

> "CSC has been a great partner because they are committed to helping the people they serve succeed. They bring new ideas, services, and resources that we haven't always thought of and this only makes SNAP E&T stronger. Our partnership with CSC works because we both come in good faith to go beyond compliance and focus on the best interest of the participant.
>
> *Candi Quintall*
> *Oregon Department of Human Services*

Community Services Consortium (CSC), a Community Action Agency serving rural parts of eastern Oregon, became a STEP third party provider in 2019. As an existing contractor for the JOBS program and WIOA Title I youth and adult programs, the addition of STEP into the agency's service array offered a natural extension to the longstanding role CSC plays meeting its community's workforce development needs and provided a tool for CSC to offer continued support for families exiting the JOBS program. To assist with the initial startup of becoming a STEP third party provider, Oregon DHS allocated funding to CSC during early implementation to cover half of the agency's match requirement. Since then, CSC has established a sustainable financing model, reinvesting federally reimbursed SNAP E&T funding in concert with other non-federal funds to grow its program.

At CSC, the agency looks at STEP as one tool that is part of a broader array of services to support communities, using a comprehensive assessment to determine families' needs and tapping into the full range of SNAP E&T components to help participants attain their long-term goals. In turn, Oregon DHS has sought to position providers such as CSC with the infrastructure they need to maximize the value of STEP within their communities. Oregon's I-Match Skills database offers providers with necessary information to determine eligibility and appropriateness of SNAP E&T services for individuals coming through their doors, creating a path for "referrals" for CSC customers that could benefit from STEP. Additionally, Oregon DHS' investment in STEP "navigators" that work more intensively with SNAP recipients to identify the best provider placements for them has further strengthened the connection between the state and providers like CSC.

Aligning in Crisis: the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

CSC's deep history partnering with Oregon DHS proved important to the agency's continued success administering STEP during the COVID-19 pandemic. CSC quickly pivoted to virtual service delivery for participants, which helped to remove the transportation challenges in CSC's service area. Given the increased need and rapidly

changing landscape of the pandemic, CSC shifted the focus of its STEP services to prioritize case management and resource navigation for STEP recipients in addition to direct employment and training services. While participation in STEP lagged early in the pandemic for CSC, engagement has returned to higher levels while CSC continues to offer a mix of in person and virtual services to conform to the specific needs of the participants.

Recognizing the shift to virtual within its provider community, Oregon DHS worked closely with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to modify the state's policies pertaining to customer reimbursements. Oregon was able to permit providers to be reimbursed for purchasing laptops for STEP recipients — a far more efficient and easier process than the prior laptop lending program. Further, the State expanded the use of reimbursements to include the purchase of cell phones and internet for customers. The agency came to the realization that these tools should be viewed no differently than participant reimbursements for bus passes or gas money, given the changing nature of how individuals achieve career building goals.

> "[SNAP E&T] provides a continuum of services for folks exiting TANF. It is a nice pathway for people to continue to receive services to help really move towards self-sufficiency."
>
> *Sharee Cooper*
> *Community Services Consortium*



Strengthening Alignment for an Equitable Recovery

Oregon DHS has sought to institutionalize within STEP efforts to address systemic inequities for communities facing barriers to accessing services. The state contract requires providers to address how they are targeting services to underserved populations and mandates that providers include an enhancement or expansion to STEP services as part of their array of services. This approach allows providers flexibility for creatively building upon STEP to remove barriers to people's economic success. CSC plans to continue to prioritize efforts to engage hard-to-reach families in the future. One promising approach to build upon is their partnership with the Oregon Health Authority to conduct outreach to immigrant communities in rural parts of their service area, connecting families to programs like STEP when appropriate.

 **Leadership**	CSC participation in continuum of workforce services across SNAP E&T, TANF, and WIOA funding Oregon DHS investment in SNAP E&T navigators to support successful provider placements
 **Service Delivery**	Development of i-Skills database to help SNAP E&T providers match with families interested in services Expansion of participant reimbursements to cover costs for remote engagement in services
 **Advancing Equity**	Oregon DHS contract with providers to incorporate wrap-around enhancements to SNAP E&T services CSC rural health partnership to target underserved immigrant communities

Oregon SNAP E&T through the Human Services Value Curve Lens





The work being led by Oregon DHS and CSC spans the integrative and generative phases of the Human Services Value Curve. DHS' efforts to build a diverse group of third-party providers with a multitude of tools that meet the needs of different community stakeholders — all interconnected through a unified data system — holds promise for addressing the root causes of poverty. Oregon's aspirations to integrate these efforts into a full continuum of family and economic services deepens their commitment towards community-level transformation. CSC's approach to blend STEP into its broader vision and programming for communities, with a focus on removing barriers to underserved communities, similarly exemplifies integrative action in practice. The two agencies' collaboration to support each other in their shared mission further helps to accelerate their collective body of work.

Opportunity for Alignment: Dismantling Structural Inequities

Work that aims to build communities across the United States where everyone can thrive requires service providers to confront the reality that disparate outcomes for different groups are driven by bias long built into our structures — rules, norms, policies, and practices that disadvantage some and privilege others. Like many other networks, both human services agencies and Community Action Agencies have bias built into their respective systems, and at the same time seek to confront and dismantle these inequities. The work of understanding, confronting and dismantling inequities takes time and looks different in each community but by working together as partners aligned around centering families, customizing services and supports to enable social and economic mobility, and using a race and social equity lens, these two systems have the potential to drive transformational systems change.

Across the country efforts are underway to deeply understand the nature and dynamics of structural inequities, using both program data and the lived experiences of families and communities to shape plans for pathways forward. As this kind of planning and analysis moves forward, strong partnerships are reshaping services in responsive, innovative ways to meet current realities. In many communities, structural inequities most heavily impact communities of color; in other areas, immigrant and refugee communities have less access to and benefit less from services and supports. Many agencies serve rural areas where communities are impacted by structures that disadvantage their residents. Every community faces its own history and reality of inequities that require not just adjustments but systems redesign. The partnerships highlighted here were developed in very different community contexts, one rural, the other suburban and highly multicultural; each illuminates ways Community Action Agencies and their human services partners can leverage their respective strengths and mitigate their respective challenges to make progress towards providing equitable access to the programs and services that improve family and community well-being.



Aligning in Crisis: the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Partners' work to address inequitable access to services as well as disparate outcomes was heavily impacted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic itself has disproportionately impacted already underserved communities increasing the need for an array of emergency supports while challenging existing methods of providing information and access. Coming together, human services agencies and Community Action partners have worked to leverage pandemic-related changes such as federal flexibilities and the switch to remote operations so that they reduced barriers to equitable access. Where issued remained or were exacerbated — like the difficulty of navigation for non-English speakers and the digital divide keeping many in rural areas from using technology to connect with services — partners have innovated and created new approaches that offer important lessons for other communities.



Strengthening Alignment for an Equitable Recovery

Working together under such trying conditions during the pandemic, partners confronted the harsh realities of inequitable access made worse by the emergency and together aligned their efforts to reach and serve more families and improve the customer experience. While the specific efforts are varied, two themes are nearly universal. First, public and nonprofit service providers can create a far easier customer experience by investing in training and supporting staff navigators; and second, dismantling structural inequities can be successful with deep listening and co-creation with people and communities impacted by the inequities.



Examples from the Field: Addressing Barriers to Accessing Services in Rural Ohio



Partnership Overview

Perry County Ohio is a rural Southeast Ohio community served by Perry County Jobs and Family Services (PCJFS) agency and Hocking Athens Perry Community Action (HAPCAP), a Community Action Agency serving Hocking, Athens, and Perry counties. While their close working relationship is relatively recent — the two agencies first entered into a contractual partnership in 2012 — their partnership is strong and tightly aligned, built on each agency's strengths and needs and a close and trusting working relationship between the two directors.

There are several key components of the agencies' aligned partnership to serve a largely underserved rural population. Co-location has enabled the two organizations to influence and align their respective workplace practices and culture, and is conducive to a "no wrong door" policy where individuals seeking assistance can be assessed and connected with the appropriate programs and services for their unique situations. Siloed and separate technology systems remain a challenge to be addressed to further ease access and navigation for families.

PCJFS and HAPCAP have used contracting to integrate service delivery to an unusual degree for the benefit of customers. While many county-based human services agencies in Ohio run the statewide TANF-funded youth employment program, Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP) in house, PCJFS stands out for its decision to provide a seamless, integrated service delivery by subcontracting nearly $1 million in TANF dollars to HAPCAP based on the agency's capability to deliver individualized services to young people aged 14 to 24 *and* their whole families. HAPCAP has taken a lead in integration by hiring community resource navigators whose job is to help customers learn about and explore the full range of services across the two organizations. PCJFS has also partnered with ten other Ohio counties to establish a regional call center to help route customers to the right service and resource. The call center now uses technology to determine real time eligibility for TANF and SNAP with the customer.

> "When we started our work implementing the Comprehensive Case Management Program in Perry County, we co-located services with JFS and shifted from a transactional, grantor-grantee relationship to a truly collaborative and meaningful partnership"
>
> *Kelly Hatas*
> *HAPCAP*

This partnership tackles the major barriers faced by underserved rural communities by planning and working together. Like many other rural areas, getting people where they need to go is a primary obstacle that can result in challenges to obtaining and keeping a job, and ultimately be a contributor in households needing public assistance. For individuals seeking medical services, lack of transportation is a critical concern. To address this, the Perry County Board of Commissioners assigned PCJFS to administer Perry County Transit (PCT). PCT is a public rural transit, that provides on demand, door-to-door transportation for customers during limited operating hours. PCT operates a flexible and responsive system to meet the transportation needs for customers, and HAPCAP works to fill gaps outside of PCT's normal operating hours.

In addition, Perry County employs a full-time Mobility Manager, who not only serves Perry County, but also developed and heads the Region 8 Mobility Solutions Center (R8MSC), that is located in Perry County. The R8MSC is a 10-county mobility partnership, that coordinates mobility resources and matches them with individuals who need the service. Finding centralized solutions to the mobility needs of the entire region uses a one-stop approach that has been revolutionary for the area's mobility resource management.

Perry County faces another barrier common to rural areas: the paucity of broadband access. For Perry County communities that lack broadband and cellphone service, hot spots will not solve the problem, and the market is not there to make provision of broadband service profitable to internet service providers. HAPCAP recently obtained funding and hired a full-time broadband coordinator to work on this issue in neighboring Athens County.

> "When we talk about strategy, I think Kelly (HAPCAP) and I always understand that it doesn't matter who does the work. What matters is the experience that the customer has."
>
> *Cheryl Boley*
> *Perry County PCJFS Director*



Aligning in Crisis: the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Because of their strong relationship, when COVID first hit, the directors of PCJFS and HAPCAP began planning how to provide food to children who relied on the National School Lunch Program. Additionally, PCJFS and HAPCAP worked together to find ways to meet people where they were, including offering hybrid training to CCMEP participants. Working in complementary ways, HAPCAP ensured that worksites for the employment programs were implementing COVID-19 safety protocols.

Every program pivoted to ensure continuity when faced with increased demand and difficult circumstances. When the first round of federal rent and utility dollars were fully spent, PCJFS contracted with HAPCAP using TANF funding to ensure Perry County residents would not face eviction or utility disconnects while waiting for additional federal relief funds to be released.



Strengthening Alignment for an Equitable Recovery

PCJFS is currently building a new education and family resource center that will be located on the Perry County Home Farm next to a post-secondary campus building housing Hocking College and Central State University. The construction has been hampered by COVID-related supply chain and material cost issues but the work continues. Building on the success of co-location with HAPCAP, PCJFS is providing behavioral health specialists and will enable HAPCAP to bring all the Perry County programs under one roof, making access to services dramatically easier for customers and provide opportunity for increased visibility and communication among staff of the organizations. The partners are committed to building on the flexibilities experienced during the pandemic and the manner in which they pivoted together to reach and serve rural communities as they look toward ensuring that pandemic recovery in Perry County is more equitable, benefiting all the county's residents.

Leadership	Cultivate partnership over time through intentional, frequent communication and trust building Participate in each other's strategic and programmatic planning processes and work together both in a contractual (subgrant) relationship and beyond
Service Delivery	Co-location facilitates access for customers and enables information sharing and collaborations between staffs Choosing partnership approach - from subcontracting to close coordination - based on capacities and best interest of customers
Advancing Equity	Rural transportation is a key structural barrier best addressed through close coordination and tailoring services to be complementary Lack of broadband and cell infrastructure limit equitable access and require partners to advocate and pursue innovative solutions together

Perry County Partnership through the Human Services Value Curve Lens







PCJFS and HAPCAP's partnership spans the collaborative, integrative, and generative phases of the Human Services Value Curve. Their initial partnership led to coordinated service delivery and a no-wrong-door approach that has evolved into more seamless, co-located services and programs that help partners meet the needs of the whole family. Their shared planning to tackle the most complex community challenges faced during COVID and the on-going barriers in access to broadband and transportation approach generative-level thinking.



Addressing Structural Inequities Examples from the Field: Montgomery County, MD



Partnership Overview

Montgomery County MD, a suburb of Washington DC, is home to a public Community Action Agency that is part of the county's large public sector health and human services agency. Leading a small Community Action Agency operating in an agency with 1600 employees that delivers a full spectrum of human services and public health services, the Community Action Agency's Executive Director works very closely with other internal departments to deliver on an agency-wide commitment to understanding the needs and gaps in services in the county and to integrating the many programs that exist within the area. Equally important, the Community Action Agency functions as a liaison and partner with community-based organizations, producing frequent communications to update colleagues about the latest key resources, particularly within the context of COVID-19 response and changing conditions, protocols, and services. The Community Action Agency's unique role serves to help make the county technology systems better serve nonprofit service providers.

Montgomery County is home to significant and diverse immigrant and refugee communities and communities of color, all experiencing structural barriers to equitable access to services; including language barriers, lack of access to adequate cellphone and broadband services, and fears about how government assistance may impact households with differences in citizenship status. Working within the Community Action framework, the agency addresses inequity through a needs assessment and strategic planning process. The agency benefits from ready access to the county's data system and the methods used to integrate census data with a county-based interactive self-sufficiency standard tool. To achieve self-sufficiency in this expensive area individuals and families need income three-to-four times higher than the federal poverty rate. The Community Action Agency is involved in applying a whole family framework to their service delivery and is a national leader in working to center participants with lived experience as leaders and advocates. Their model, called the Community Advocacy Institute, has been featured as a best practice within the national Community Action Network.

> "One thing that I feel is not as optimized in many agencies is being able to use your Board to generate change. There is a place for organizations to build that capacity — by having the people you serve be the spokespeople, it speaks to the larger Community Action role to create change and build opportunity."
>
> *Sharon Strauss*
> *Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services*



Aligning in Crisis: the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

When faced with the pandemic the entire health and human services agency moved to remote work quickly and with relatively little difficulty, but this was less true for the people they served, many of whom have challenges with remote access. The Community Action Agency team worked with customers to overcome these challenges, engaging younger, more digitally literate family members to help parents and grandparents, and connecting families virtually with bilingual, culturally competent staff from offices that would normally have been too far to reach. In rapid response to emerging COVID-related access issues the team took organic and data driven approaches to problem solving. Heat maps were created to show the disproportionate COVID impact on neighborhoods of color,

resulting in a public health response to overcome inequitable access to testing and vaccination. The result has been a highly effective Latino Health Initiative that produced an outcome rarely seen elsewhere during the pandemic, a Latino vaccination rate higher than that of the white population. The agency's COVID-19 Food Security Task Force also pivoted to meet nutritional needs in the Latino community, deploying staff to provide family sized packages of rice and beans at accessible community sites.



Strengthening Alignment for an Equitable Recovery

The experience of responding to the pandemic has reinforced the need for on-going analysis of every aspect of the agency's work. The Community Action team and colleagues are working on a navigation training for agency staff that will provide a template showing the pathways to accessing the most frequently needed services, and then add skills in how to help each customer to get the customized supports s/he needs. Going forward, the agency will build on the success of the Latino Health Initiative and on the critical impact of bilingual staff as they work to make post-COVID recovery more equitable for all.



Leadership

Center the experiences of community members and provide advocacy training to amplify impact and nurture leaders

Use both the community-based nonprofit and the public sector agency lenses to build strong partnerships



Service Delivery

Data and technology can be powerful tools in understanding gaps and improving access

Staff training and ongoing communication with community partners is another key component of navigation



Advancing Equity

Successful outreach to underserved communities works best when you engage trusted community members as messengers

Data together with lived experiences are central to any analysis of barriers to equity and to shaping solutions

Montgomery County, MD through the Human Services Value Curve Lens





Montgomery County Community Action works within the larger health and human services agency to create a customized staff navigation training that includes a collaborative mindset — teaching pathways to access the most frequently needed supports and services — but goes beyond to an integrative approach, teaching how to engage customers around what is most important to them rather than limiting the interaction to using a standard, menu-like benefits checklist.

