

Question 1: How the Two-Generation/Whole Family Approach Reflects Community Action's Vision and Values

The two-generation, or whole family, approach is closely aligned with the values and long-standing mission of the Community Action movement. This model supports the progress of both parents and their children at the same time, recognizing that a family's well-being is interconnected. It offers a more complete strategy to reduce poverty by meeting the needs of the entire family unit rather than focusing on just one individual, which is central to how Community Action has operated for decades.

Below are three core values from the Community Action Body of Knowledge and how each one is demonstrated through the two-generation approach:

1. "Poverty can be eliminated by creating an environment that encourages opportunities for everyone."

The two-generation approach provides those opportunities through coordinated services that meet both parent and child needs. For instance, children may access high-quality early education while their parents receive workforce training, mental health counseling, or financial coaching. This model used by many organizations highlighted by Ascend at the Aspen Institute ensures families are supported on multiple fronts, increasing their chances of long-term success and breaking

generational cycles of poverty.

2. “Despair can be replaced by opportunity and hope through Community Action intervention.”

Community Action has always focused on helping families build brighter futures. The two-generation approach enhances this mission by delivering tools, resources, and encouragement to families working toward self-reliance. The John T. Gorman Foundation in Maine provides an example where families benefit from coordinated case management, career support, and early childhood services. These interventions give parents hope and children a stronger start in life replacing despair with realistic opportunities.

3. “The impoverished individuals, families, and communities can be enabled and assisted to attain self-sufficiency and independence.”

This value is realized when families are viewed as partners in their own success. The two-generation model emphasizes personalized goal setting and service planning, often guided by trained coaches. Programs informed by the ACF’s “Defining a Two-Generation Logic Model” demonstrate how agencies can help families build their capabilities, shift from crisis to stability, and move confidently toward long-term independence.

In addition, the two-generation approach puts into practice the belief that “Community Action’s success is dependent upon the collective efforts of the entire

community and its institutions.” These programs require strong partnerships between school systems, health care providers, job centers, and social service agencies. For example, in my own agency, we coordinate with the local school districts and workforce boards to ensure that parents and children receive services through an aligned, family-centered model.

Finally, this model reflects the belief that “systems and people have the potential for change.” When families are supported across generations through coaching, education, and economic opportunities—real transformation occurs. Families do not just learn to manage poverty; they gain the tools and confidence to overcome it entirely.

Question 2: Incorporating the Two-Generation/Whole Family Approach into Community Action Work

Individual/Family-Level Example

A straightforward way for a Community Action Agency (CAA) to apply the two-generation approach is by aligning early childhood education with services that strengthen a parent’s economic potential. One example is Tulsa’s CareerAdvance program, which pairs Head Start with training in high demand careers such as healthcare. Children attend high quality preschool while their parents participate in career coaching, job training, and support services. The result is improved economic stability for parents and better developmental outcomes for children.

Another effective example is combining financial education with youth services. A CAA could offer financial coaching and matched savings programs to parents while simultaneously providing afterschool programming for their children. This helps the entire household build a foundation for long-term success, promotes financial literacy, and supports youth development in a coordinated way.

Community-Level/Systemic Example

At the systems level, CAAs can act as conveners to align community resources and institutional partners around a two-generation framework. For instance, an agency may lead a collective impact initiative involving school districts, housing providers, healthcare systems, and local employers to ensure that services are integrated, family-centered, and accessible. The Urban Institute and Annie E. Casey Foundation have documented how such place-based partnerships can create lasting infrastructure for whole family advancement.

CAAs can also drive systems change by advocating for cross-agency data-sharing agreements. For example, if school systems, health clinics, and employment programs agree to securely share information, agencies can more effectively coordinate care, reduce duplication, and improve outcomes. These partnerships not only streamline services but also help policymakers and funders see the long-term return on investing in family-centered strategies.

Whether at the individual or systemic level, the two-generation/whole family

approach strengthens Community Action's ability to reduce poverty, promote economic mobility, and foster lasting resilience across generations.