

The Call for Change

Our Transformation to Impact

In January 2003 the United Way Board of Directors approved a new “Agenda for Change” which details seven goals for changing our community’s conditions. The Agenda provides the blueprint for the positive changes that the community and our partners have told us are the most important to meet at this time.

The transformation of United Way around a new mission of community impact is bringing more powerful and relevant solutions to our social problems. An important dimension of the change is strategic. We’re bringing these solutions to scale by discovering, developing, learning, applying and finding the best and biggest ideas about strengthening our community to improve lives.

Why?

Our donors and the community have challenged us. As we present them with greater community needs and greater requests for resources every year, they have asked, “What are you doing to reduce or eliminate the underlying causes of those needs? That’s your job!”

At the same time we had the opportunity to work at the community-wide scale on an important issue — the racial achievement gap — where we learned how to:

- Create change at a community-wide level
- Provide leadership and support to the partners that did the work
- Focus and engage the community in a common vision
- Use data, research and best practices
- Identify strategies that get results

Together these two experiences convinced us that we could not only provide more value to the community, but also that we had a moral imperative to take our work to another level.

Staff Contact: Deedra Atkinson

2059 Atwood Avenue
Madison, WI 53704
(608) 246-4350
FAX (608) 246-4349
www.unitedwaydanecounty.org



The Change Process

In order to create positive change in the human condition at the community level we needed to make some significant changes in our approach to our work. Simply moving dollars around between programs — even with the best needs assessment, the best outcomes process and the best agencies — is not enough to create the kind of significant sustained change in conditions that our community and the people in it want to see.

Our Board appointed a multidisciplinary task force led by Tom Zimbrick to evaluate how we might evolve in response to our donors' challenge, using our experience with the community-wide change of the racial achievement gap. Following a year of study, analysis and community involvement, the task force affirmed our core competencies: assessing needs, raising and distributing resources, and evaluating results. They recommended four key strategies for United Way to create change in the human condition at the community level.

- 1) We are **organized around a vision** (not service category or need areas) of what we want to accomplish in our community. We identify research-based strategies, innovations and solutions to achieve this vision. This is a very powerful tool for creating the change we want to see.
- 2) We are **engaging the community** in a common vision and in understanding the scope, dimensions and solutions to the problems we are tackling. That understanding will result in the community investing time and money, and also will generate the public will to achieve results.
- 3) We have a **different set of measures** that focuses on results at the community scale. In the past, we measured our success based on campaign results. Now we have measures at the community level that allow us to clearly evaluate our impact on the human condition and communicate that impact to the community effectively.
- 4) We are **developing our non-profit partners** (agencies) to encourage them to move beyond their role as service providers to be able to provide leadership in reducing and eliminating the underlying causes of the needs with which they are so familiar.

Progress

We have moved forward with implementing these four transformational ideas. We created volunteer committees called Community Solution Teams (CSTs) that, along with our partners and the community, identified the Agenda for Change.

- **Students of color achieve at the same rate as white students.**
- **Children are cared for and have fun as they become prepared for school.**
- **People who are uninsured have access to health care.**
- **There is a decrease in homelessness.**
- **Seniors and people with disabilities are able to stay in their homes.**
- **There is a reduction in violence toward individuals and families.**
- **Non-profit agencies and volunteers are strong partners in achieving measurable results.**

The CSTs received input from the broader community, including our partners and agencies through **forums, surveys, volunteering and meetings** in the process of identifying this agenda. Together we are developing strategies, innovations and solutions to achieve the agenda. We will continue to engage the community and our partners as we move forward (**community engagement**).

Each CST analyzed data, research and best practices as we developed the agenda. We have identified specific measures for each agenda item. We have created an **Index of Impact** to monitor our community's collective work to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies and our progress on our agenda (**measures**).

We spent two years working with our partners to prepare them for the shift in resources to the agenda. We have developed an **agency self-assessment tool**, and a **Volunteer Consulting Service** to help them strengthen their organizations. We are asking agencies to take a leadership position with our initiatives, moving those initiatives to agencies to sustain the work. And, we've assisted agencies in **developing outcome measurements** that are antecedents to success in our community's Agenda. We will continue to discover ways to help agencies develop their leadership (**develop our partners**).

The Future

Our CSTs have been working to align our resources to have the greatest impact and effectiveness in achieving our community's vision (The Agenda for Change). We've increased our ability to recruit volunteers focused on the agenda. The CSTs are working with community partners to explore promising practices, determine best practices, and share these with the agencies. We will continue to engage the community to hone the vision, strategies and measures through community engagement, community conversations, surveys, town hall meetings and web-based interaction. We are producing calls to action for the community around specific strategies and best practices. We will continue to inform the community about results through Impact Reports and our Annual Report.

While we have involved the community in the change on a regular and on-going basis, we want to be sure the community and our constituents understand the context and reason for the changes we have implemented.

This is more difficult and qualitatively different than our work before. It's the difference between providing quality shelter for 100 homeless people versus reducing the rate of homelessness by half over five years. Obviously, we can't do this alone — it requires significant resources spent in a purposeful way over a long period of time on specific and tested strategies. It requires collaboration that leads to agreement on community priorities, agreement on how the problems will be solved and ultimately alignment of community resources around these problems and strategies.

Over the next several years we will be doing our best to unite and focus the community in order to make the changes you want to see on these issues. We will use best practices, data and research to evaluate our progress. We will be accountable to you for results. This is our promise.

Thank you for helping us shape the Agenda and for your support which makes our work possible. Thank you for helping us to achieve what matters. Together, united, we will improve lives and build a stronger Dane County.



Leslie Ann Howard
President