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Executive Summary

United Way of Windham County Community Needs Assessment

April 2009

Methodology



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United Way Convened Needs Assessment Committee

- Agency of Human Services
- Brattleboro Memorial Hospital
- The Brattleboro Retreat
- United Way of Windham County

Developed a Framework for Quality of Life Measures

Created a Needs Assessment Work Plan

Conducted the Needs Assessment in 4 Phases

- Data Analysis
- 305 Household Random Sample Telephone Survey
- 8 Focus Groups
- 11 Key Leader Interviews

Methodology (continued)



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Data Analysis – Quality of Life Chapters

- Demographics
- Economic Well-Being (Housing, Jobs, Income)
- Education & Lifelong Learning
- Health & Wellness
- Land Use & Infrastructure (Includes Transportation)
- Human Services & Safety
- Community Involvement
- Arts & Culture
- Spirituality & Faith

305 Household Random Sample Telephone Survey

- Economic well-being
- Access to healthcare & human services
- Community involvement
- Priorities to improve quality of life
- Margin of sampling error +/- 5.6%

Methodology (continued)



8 Focus Groups (80 People)

- 5 at the Marlboro Tech Center in Brattleboro
- 1 at the Baptist Church Overflow Shelter in Brattleboro
- 1 in Bellows Falls
- 1 in Wilmington
- **56 People Participated in Focus Group Meetings**, representing:
 - 19 Health & Human Services
 - 8 Faith Community, Civic Associations, Citizen Advocates
 - 8 Education
 - 7 Business & Economic Development
 - 7 Consumers
 - 5 Town, County & State Government
 - 2 The Arts
- **24 Mailed In Comments** - both meetings / mailed comments included minorities

Methodology (continued)



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11 Key Leader Interviews Representing:

- Healthcare
- State & Town Government
- Education
- Entrepreneurship /Self-Employed Business
- Public Housing
- Human Services
- Citizen Action
- Service Organizations

Demographics in Windham County Impact the Quality of Life



Windham County's Population is Aging

- Impacts healthcare, housing & employment
 - Fewer workers
 - Increased demand for services
 - Disease prevention & treatment
 - Community based elder services, e.g., assisted living, adult day care, & home care
 - Young have different needs – child care, schools, after school programs

19% are Disabled (5 years & older)

The Population is Becoming More Racially Diverse

- Requires knowledge of multiple cultures
- Skills needed to build culturally appropriate services
- Some perception of discrimination

Demographics in Windham County

Impact the Quality of Life (continued)



Some Residents Live in Poverty

- 11% of the total population
- Much higher (52%) in single female households, with children under 5 years
- Higher levels of social & health needs
 - Affective disorders
 - Risk of drug & alcohol abuse
 - Violence
 - Depression
 - Behavioral & learning difficulties in school

Windham County Has Four Defined, Different Regions With:

- Different needs
- Varied services available
- Differing levels of public transportation to access services

Demographics in Windham County

Impact the Quality of Life (continued)



Difficult to Access Services in Outlying Areas

- Expensive to support services in outlying areas
- Potential collaboration among service providers & creative use of new technologies

Most Vulnerable & Elders, Children, Low Income & Disabled:

- Utilize more services
- Dispersed throughout the County
- Services concentrated in the Southeast region

Highest Priority Issues in Windham County

In Alphabetical, Not Priority Order

- **Affordable Housing** – Workforce housing, no start-up housing, low-income housing, high cost of ownership & rental
- **Child Care** – Availability & affordability
- **Education** – Public education, adult learning beyond high school, high school dropouts
- **Elder Services** – A lack of staff & elder access to existing services to help elders stay in their homes
- **Healthcare Access** – For adults, children, accessibility & availability of both medical providers & alcohol / drug abuse providers
- **Jobs & Employment** – Lack of a livable wage, job development, trained workforce, transportation to jobs
- **Transportation** – Need to improve public transportation to / from outlying areas

Social Capital

Definition:

Connections within & between social networks, as well as connections among individuals (Source: Wikipedia).

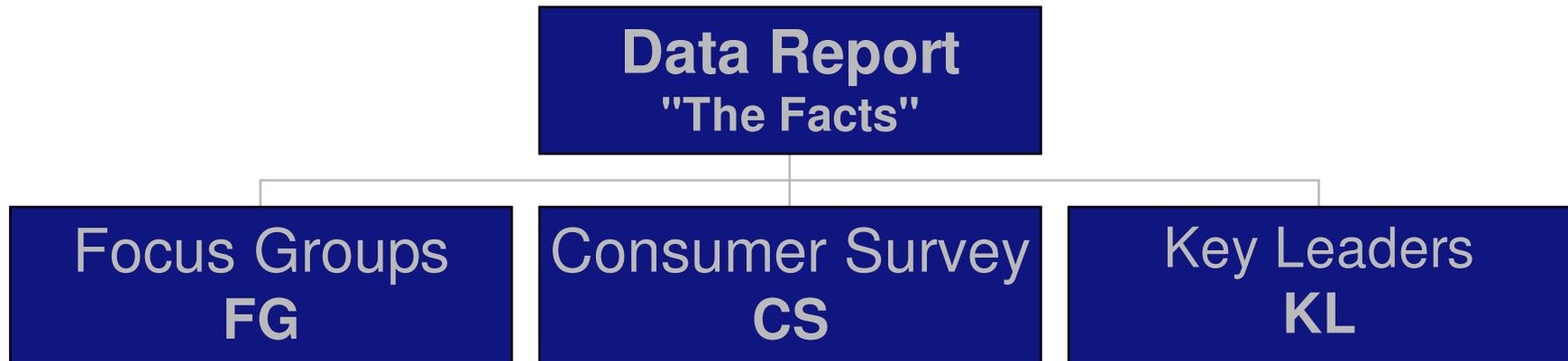


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Windham County Has Tremendous Social Capital

- High levels of volunteerism
- Good will
- Friendliness
- Tolerance
- Feelings of “community”

Sources of Information



Affordable Housing The Facts



Homes Are Out of Reach for Many Residents

- Median prices of Windham County homes increased 103% from 1996 – 2009
- Many household incomes do not cover home ownership
- It takes a household income of about \$63,000 to purchase a median priced home in Windham County
- 66% of households have annual incomes below that

Many Household Incomes Do Not Cover Rental Costs

- A 2-bedroom apartment requires \$17.77 / hour income, which equals 275% of minimum wage (assuming the renter spends 30% of income for housing)

Affordable Housing



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Strengths

- Housing Trust / Land Trust is an Asset (FG, KL)
 - Refurbished buildings (FG)
 - Well administered (FG)
 - Positive community impact (FG)

Weaknesses

- 25% of homeowners concerned about losing their homes (CS)
- 42% of renters concerned about need to move to a less expensive apartment (CS)
- 15% report difficulty paying their mortgage (CS)
- 25% report difficulty paying for heating (CS)
- Restrictive application policies for Section 8 (FG)
- Lack of affordable housing (FG)
 - Workforce (FC, KL)
 - Low-income (FG, KL)
 - Single homes & apartments (FG, KL)
- Little upward mobility for lower income (KL)

Affordable Housing



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Ideas to Improve

- Home Share program (FG)
- More Section 8 housing certificates (FG)
- Rethink land use, business & congregate housing / clusters (FG)
- Develop models for hard to house (FG)
- Teen temporary housing (FG)
- Supported Housing
- Housing Committee Study (KL)
- Multi-generational housing (KL)
- Support services to low-income tenants (KL)
- Church donations of land (KL)

Child Care

Strengths

- Building Bright Futures Council
- Kids Are Priority One legislative advocacy
- Windham Child Care Association

Weaknesses

- Child care jobs are low pay (FG)
- High staff turnover (FG)
- Lack of available child care (KL)
- Lack of affordable child care (KL)

Ideas to Improve

- Assure that the 32% households that may need child care (CS)
- Fund affordable child care (KL)

Education The Facts



Public school dropout rates are higher in most Windham County public schools than in Vermont:

- 2.5% - 7.0% of 9th –12th graders dropped out of school from 2007-2008.

In 2006, an estimated 85% of Windham County 12th graders completed high school within four years:

- Wilmington region students were more likely to complete high school within four years (91%), followed by the Brattleboro region (82%);
- Lower completion rates were experienced in the Rockingham & Central / Northwest towns (71% each).

Fewer Windham County residents have Associates level degrees than Vermont (6.0% vs. 7.7%)

The County has a greater proportion of people who attended some college (18.1% vs. 16.9%) or have graduate / professional degrees (12.4% vs. 11.1%).

Education

Strengths

- People attracted here – impressive education / experience (FG)
- Intellectual capital / supports (FG)
- Public schools unify communities (Wilmington FG)
- Schools accommodate to improve student performance (FG)
- Community supports education (FG)
- Small school setting = opportunity for many activities (FG)
- A lot of educational organizations (FG)
- Quality of public schools is a strength (FG, KL)
- Private School quality is a strength (KL)
- Many local colleges (KL)

Weaknesses

- Underutilized intellectual capital (FG)
- High school dropout rate (FG)
- Illiteracy (FG)
- Funding is divisive (FG)
- Kids' pregnancy / mental health issues (FG)
- Lack of family support / generational (FG, KL)
- Variable education quality by town, age, segments (FG, KL)
- Outdated facilities (FG)
- Expensive facility / repair / teachers at top of pay grade (KL)

Education

Ideas to Improve

- Improve graduation rate (FG)
- Local colleges can enrich the community (FG)
- Deal with systemic family issues (FG)
- Full service schools with health, physical, mental, social & educational support (FG)
- Teen mentoring & guidance (FG)
- Implement Path Program (FG)
- Match training center programs with local business needs (FG)
- Integrate education & workforce development (FG, KL)
- Priority fund early education / brain development (FG, KL)
- After school programs / Elementary / High School / non-sport (FG, KL)
- Higher quality schools (KL)

Elder Services

The Facts



Windham County has a higher percent of older adults than VT:

- More older adults 45 – 64 year olds (33.1% vs. 30% VT)
- More elderly 65 years & older (14.5% vs. 13.6% VT)
- By 2016, over one in five Windham County residents will be elderly (21.1% vs. 18.1% VT), which will result in increased demand for:
 - Inpatient & outpatient hospital care, physician care
 - Community based elder services such as assisted living, adult day care, & home care
- 44% of elder households live alone & are at risk for falls, depression & poor health
- 48% of Windham County low income elders receive Medicaid funded home / community based care, similar to VT
- 3.8% of elders in Windham County are at risk for depression, lower than VT

Elder Services

Strengths

- Many non-profit human service organizations (FG)

Weaknesses

- No supports for elderly to stay in their homes (FG)
- Aging money is not used to replace nursing home costs with community services (FG)
- Lack of workforce to serve elderly – a “time bomb” (FG)
- Elders lack access to community services (KL)

Ideas to Improve

- Assure that the 3% of households that may need adult day care have access to this service (CS)
- Strategic plan to reduce barriers for disabled seniors (FG)
- Partner seniors with other age groups / programs (FG)
- Use national model to divert nursing home care (FG)
- Put resources into community based eldercare services to help elders stay in their homes (FG, KL)
- Group elder home (KL)

Healthcare Access

The Facts



Unhealthy Lifestyles

- As in Vermont, unhealthy lifestyles contribute to premature death of Windham County residents, who are worse than the healthy Vermonters 2010 goal for:
 - Youth regular exercise
 - Youth & adult recommended vegetables & fruit
 - Overweight / obesity
 - Adult high blood pressure
 - Youth & adult smoking
- Windham County adults are better than the goal for leisure time activity
- 24% of Windham County high school students binge drink
- Windham County residents 18+ years are less likely to binge drink than Vermonters, but more likely to drink & drive
- Windham County teens are not as likely to practice safe sex as Vermont teens
- Vermont minority youth are less likely to lead healthy lifestyles than whites

Healthcare Access The Facts



As in Vermont, Windham County adults do not have adequate access to healthcare:

- 14% of adults in Windham County do not have a regular doctor
- 16% of adults are uninsured (14% VT)
- Pregnant women in Windham County have statistically less access to prenatal care in the first 3 months of pregnancy than Vermont (87% vs. 90%, which is also slightly lower than the Healthy Vermonters 2010 goal of 90%).
- Similar to Vermont, 89% of pregnant women in Windham County received both early & adequate prenatal care (slightly lower than the 90% Healthy Vermonters 2010 goal).
- Only 68% of VT primary care physicians accept Medicaid
- Only 71% of VT primary care physicians accept Medicare

Healthcare Access The Facts



Compared to Vermont, Windham County's:

- Young teen birth rate is statistically worse (although VT has the 2nd lowest US teen pregnancy rate)
- Stroke death rate is statistically better
- Heart disease death rate is similar
- Breast cancer screening rate is statistically worse
- Colon cancer screening is statistically worse
- Diabetes care & outcomes are better than or equal
- Respiratory disease incidence & death rates are similar
- Although declining, rates of injury resulting in hospitalization are higher among all age groups, except 0 – 9 year olds

Healthcare Access Medical, Mental Health & Substance Abuse Care



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Strengths

- Brattleboro Memorial Hospital & The Brattleboro Retreat are assets / available / can treat almost all needs locally (FG, KL)
- Brattleboro Memorial Hospital and The Brattleboro Retreat have a good reputation (FG)
- Tertiary care at Dartmouth (FG)
- Brattleboro Memorial Hospital - phenomenal expansion / sophisticated / many services (FG)
- Number of private MDs (FG, KL)
- Alternative practices / healing community (FG, KL)
- Special populations, e.g., CARES for seniors, AIDS (FG)
- Holt Fund (FG)
- Many mental health / substance abuse programs - Wellness Recovery Action Plan, Tapestry, 12-Step programs, Elm Street Turning Point, & Stepping Stone (FG)
- Wellness / lifestyle services (KL)
- Community oriented providers (KL)

Healthcare Access Medical & Dental Care



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Weaknesses

- **Lack of available medical & dental providers (FG)**
 - Low salaries not attractive to physicians (FG)
 - Not enough caregivers/low wages (FG)
 - Lack of available dentists (FG, KL)
 - Huge provider loans limit providers choice of VT / incomes are higher in other areas (KL)
- **Lack of access to affordable health & dental care (FG, KL)**
 - 19% needed & had problems accessing health care (CS)
 - 19% had difficulty paying for medical care (CS)
 - 19% had difficulty paying for dental care (CS)
 - 13% had difficulty paying for health insurance (CS)
 - Income under \$20,000 / not affordable (FG)
 - Doctors & dentists not accepting Medicaid (FG)
 - Children suffering dental pain / image (FG)
 - Medicaid dental care - have to go to Bennington (FG)
 - Lack of health insurance for adults (FG)
 - Gap for chronically ill under 60 years old (FG)
- Teen pregnancy (FG)
- High percent of Medicaid clients (KL)
- Primary care shortage (KL)
- Respond to, not prevent illness (KL)
- Midlevel practitioner law restricts practice without an MD (KL)
- Hospital proximity from rural areas (KL)

Healthcare Access Mental Health & Substance Abuse Care

Weaknesses

- **Inadequate access to [affordable] mental health & substance abuse treatment, especially crisis care (FG, KL)**
 - 4% needed & could not access counseling or treatment (CS)
 - No mental health beds (FG)
 - Hospitals not taking substance patients (FG)
 - Alcohol a huge issue / treatment incredibly difficult (FG)
 - If you don't have insurance, the only detox is "go to jail" (FG)
 - Low physician awareness of medical issues / resources available (FG)
 - Huge need for intensive outpatient substance abuse services for youth (FG)
 - Insidious & growing drug culture, norms, income source, parents using (FG)
 - Restricted state reimbursement to The Brattleboro Retreat for services, including Hospital ER cases (FG, KL)
 - Many competent individuals, but the services are poorly organized and administered (FG)
 - Community must deal with "behaviors" of untreated mental illness (KL)
- Not a lot of options, other than drinking (FG)
- Increased mental illness, homelessness, substance abuse, & kids exhibiting stress (FG)

Healthcare Access



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Ideas to Improve

Medical & Dental Care

- Universal health insurance (FG)
- Legislator education to fund prevention (FG)
- Keep people healthy to reduce health insurance cost (FG)
- Application assistance for parents (FG)
- Bring [primary care] services to families, schools, communities (FG)
- Technology for in-home care (FG)
- Free clinics / additional volunteers / fund healthcare services (FG, KL)
- Increase the number of primary care practitioners in Windham County (KL)
- Provider loan forgiveness (KL)
- FQHC funding (KL)
- Single payer (KL)
- Medicare / Medicaid resume funding of home health (KL)
- Private practice dental hygienists in the clinic to serve children (FG)
- Fund dental services (KL)

Mental Health & Substance Abuse Care

- Brattleboro Memorial Hospital and The Brattleboro Retreat should fund a detox and treatment program (FG)
- Provide free detox (FG)
- Shelter beds for people who are not sober (FG)
- Create a crisis program at The Brattleboro Retreat (Medicaid fund mental health & addiction treatment at The Brattleboro Retreat for adults) (KL)
- Integration of BMH & The Brattleboro Retreat (KL)
- Collaboration with Grace Cottage Hospital (KL)
- Provide mental health and/or substance abuse treatment for offenders in jail who are mentally ill, retarded, substance users, disabled, etc. (FG)
- Alternatives to Corrections (KL)
- State regulation changes to integrate mental healthcare (KL)
- The Brattleboro Retreat should be involved in the State Hospital plan (KL)

Jobs & Employment

The Facts



Jobs

- Windham County is losing, rather than creating, private sector jobs.
 - From 1998 – 2001, Windham County experienced a sharper decline than Vermont in the rate of new private sector job creation (–3.0% in 2001).
 - In 2006, the County lost 1.4% of its private sector jobs, while Vermont gained 0.7% in new jobs.

Employment

- From 2006 – 2008, Windham County's unemployment rate increased from 3.8% to 5.4%, slightly lower than Vermont (6.0%).
- Windham County has a lower percent of 20 – 44 year olds than Vermont, which means proportionally fewer workers (29.8% vs. 32.2% VT).
- From 1997 – 2006, only 59% of Windham County disabled workers placed successfully in jobs, similar to Vermont (61.1%).

Jobs & Employment

The Facts (continued)



Income

- In Windham County:
 - The median household income is consistently lower than Vermont. In 2007, County households earned \$44,372 annually, \$5,010 less than Vermont.
 - Since 2004, the average annual private sector wage has declined, while Vermont's has increased. In 2006, the County's annual wage was \$34,071, or \$903 less than Vermont.
 - From 2004 – 2006, 11.1% of residents lived at 100% of poverty, slightly higher than Vermont (10.7%).
 - 22.4% of female heads of household with no husband present, live in poverty.
 - The rate increases to 28.3% with children under 18 years
 - The rate increases even higher to 52.2% with children under 5 years
 - Free and reduced lunch, a proxy for child poverty, varies by school, with the highest rate at over 69% of children (SE region).

Jobs & Employment

Strengths

- Diverse employers (FG)
- Vibrant downtown (FG)
- Port city vitality (FG)
- Foreign trade zone status (FG)
- Strong agricultural presence (FG)
 - Small farms growing (FG)
 - Grow & buy locally / Farmer's Market (FG)
- Many job development organizations & opportunities (FG)
 - 250 jobs / week require college & technical skills (FG)
 - Incubator businesses (FG)
 - Readiness Program, Bridges Out of Poverty, Reach Up Program (FG)
 - Career Center / high school job training (FG)
 - Entrepreneurial spirit (KL)
- Location near jobs – some areas (KL)
- Strong business community (KL)
- BDCC leadership (KL)
- Local ownership (KL)
- Proud history of craftsmanship (KL)

Jobs & Employment



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Weaknesses

- 36% of self-employed, part-time, seasonal, & unemployed workers want more hours (CS)
- **Lack of a livable wage (FG)**
 - High cost of living / not affordable / shocking (FG, KL)
 - “Working poor” (FG)
 - Number with more than one job is overwhelming (FG, KL)
 - Low paying, no benefit jobs, tourism based economy (KL)
- **Lack of jobs / job opportunities / job development (FG, KL)**
 - Lack of major corporation jobs / wages (FG)
 - Low paying private sector jobs (FG)
 - Losing farms / not economical (FG)
 - A lot of underemployment (FG)
 - Marginal / seasonal jobs (FG)
 - No jobs for youth (FG)
 - Lack of jobs for disabled, or with jail records / mental health / substance issues (FG)
- **Lack of trained workforce / can’t find qualified applicants (FG, KL)**
 - Lack of certification / skills (FG, KL)
 - Lack of literacy / under educated (FG)
 - Exodus of youth (KL)
 - Must recruit out of area (KL)
 - Weak business / art connection (KL)
 - Regulations to locate wind turbines (KL)

Jobs & Employment

Ideas to Improve

- **Create higher paying job opportunities with a livable wage** (FG, KL)
 - Create transitional work programs (FG)
 - Obtain stimulus package money (FG)
 - Hire locals (FG)
 - Create small businesses/entrepreneurs (FG, KL)
 - State incentives for businesses (FG)
 - Reduce barriers of housing, land use laws, Internet, etc. (FG)
 - Vertical integration (FG)
 - Farm re-tooling (FG)
 - Student job search tools (FG)
 - Income producing jobs before prison release (FG)

- **Increase workforce training** (FG)
 - Job skills, emotional skills, socialization (FG)
 - Workforce investment committee to improve skills (FG)
 - Train in shortages, e.g., LNA, dental tech (FG)
 - Develop certified training / licensure programs (FG)
 - Utilize the Career Center more (FG)
- Expand the tax base (FG)
- Regional economic plan development (KL)
- Change business culture to attract youth (KL)
- Expand non-tourism jobs (KL)
- Expand tourism jobs (KL)
- Package several jobs (KL)
- Unemployment assistance (KL)
- Beneficiaries of human services give back/jobs (FG)

Transportation



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Strengths

- Public transportation in & to Brattleboro (FG)
- Vans, volunteer drivers (FG)
- School buses to the Career Center (FG)
- Many options - I-91, CRT, train etc. (FG, KL)
- Deerfield Valley public transportation (KL)

Weaknesses

- 9% report difficulties getting transportation every month (CS)
- 17% have difficulty paying for transportation (CS)
- Need subsidized transportation outside Brattleboro (FG)
- Large distances between towns (FG, KL)
- Huge part of education cost (FG)
- Winter roads (KL)
- Leads to isolation (KL)
- Bus hours, nights, summers (KL)
- Train is expensive / only once a day (FG)
- Route 30 corridor (KL)
- Road construction lagged, now improved (KL)
- Need to rebuild Putney Road (KL)

Transportation

Ideas to Improve

- Study public transit and jobs (FG)
- Provide vans / transportation from outlying areas (FG)
- Develop van / public transportation (FG, KL)
 - Workers (FG, KL)
 - Families (KL)
 - Students (KL)
- Expand Deerfield Valley transportation (KL)
- Improve Route 5 (KL)
- Use school buses during the day (KL)



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Advice to United Way



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Continue to Fund Direct Services

- Key Leaders want United Way to fund direct services:
 - 5 of 11 Key Leaders want United Way to continue funding direct services
 - 2 of 11 Key Leaders want United Way to fund sustainable programs
- Many Focus Group participants want United Way to fund direct services:
 - 2 of 8 groups suggested “first tier basics,” e.g., housing, heat, food, jobs & transportation
 - The 2 outlying areas would like more outreach programs
 - Multiple constituent or specific program funding was cited, including funding the most vulnerable, disabled, hospice, 211, youth, elderly, Walk-In Clinic, weatherization, regional website, & the ABC role
 - A few want United Way to fund agency operations

Advice to United Way



Facilitate & Foster Collaboration among Non-Profits

- **8 of 11 Key Leaders want United Way to foster collaboration**
 - Identify problems & target resources
 - Coordinated approach / better allocation of resources
 - Services in one building / under one umbrella / Alliance of Human Services
 - Facilitate the process [of meeting needs], rather than just a funding source
 - Dovetail human services delivery into town plans
 - All early education programs attend legislative breakfast
- **Several Focus Groups want United Way to facilitate collaboration by funding:**
 - Partnerships
 - Based on degrees of collaboration
 - Specific populations (e.g., elders & youth)

Advice to United Way



Provide Leadership By:

- **Convening Others**
 - **Many Focus Group participants** want United Way to be a catalyst for planning & action, such as:
 - Conducting a strategic planning process
 - Convening a Quality of Life Blueprint group
 - Involving state & national government
- **Being Directive**
 - **Some Focus Group participants** want United Way to exert its authority by:
 - Being the “Tugboat of the Human Services ship”
 - Convening NO BIG MEETINGS, but instead identify problems, create the the vision & focus the doers
 - Reducing, revising & merging organizations

Advice to United Way



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Engage the Community to Implement the Assessment

- **9 of 11 Key Leaders** want United Way to assure implementation of the Assessment by:
 - Engaging towns, legislative delegations, Chamber, The Brattleboro Retreat, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, etc.
 - Advocating for towns & organizations to act
 - Building awareness about the Assessment, involving the press, etc.
 - Conducting monthly meetings
 - Creating & distributing a quarterly progress report

Provide Consultation to Non-Profits

- **5 of 11 Key Leaders** want United Way to consult with non-profits to increase efficiency & effectiveness
- **Several Focus Group participants** want United Way to fund agency skill building

Clarify United Way's Mission

- **A few Focus Group participants** want United Way to clarify its mission