

**What Income/Public Assistance/Housing/Homelessness strategies have the potential to have the greatest impact across all focus areas (Education and Life Skills/Health and Safety/Income and Stability)?**

1) Strategies that **INCREASE THE SUPPLY AND GEOGRAPHIC DISPERSAL OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING** would have a significant impact on all three focus areas.

Access to affordable housing:

- increases **housing stability**, which, in turn, improves **education** outcomes for children by reducing the mobility of low-income families;
- improves **health** by reducing exposure to environmental hazards and freeing up resources to pay for health expenses and more nutritious food; and
- reduces **homelessness**;

Dispersal of affordable housing:

- increases access to **employment** for low-income workers, and
- creates better opportunities for children.

Studies have consistently shown that expanding affordable housing does not increase crime or negatively impact property values.

It will take a multi-tiered approach to increase the supply of affordable housing. Examples of strategies that have been successful in other communities include:

Establishing a **Housing Partnership Equity Trust**, a social-purpose real estate investment trust that provides a ready source of long-term, low-cost capital for affordable multifamily housing.

Developing **Employer Assisted Housing**, public-private partnerships where companies provide homeownership counseling and financial assistance to employees who purchase or rent homes in communities where they work. A study in Wisconsin found employees living in Employer Assisted Housing had retention rates 2-3 times greater than their average employee and regional retention rates.

AND

Implementing **Land Use and Regulatory Policies** such as **inclusionary or incentive zoning**, which either requires a number of low- and moderate- units along with the development of market rate apartments or provides incentives for developers to include a mix of units, and **fee reductions or expedited processing** for developers of affordable housing.

2) Strategies that **ENSURE THAT LOW WAGE WORKERS ACCESS WORK SUPPORTS** such as child care subsidies, health insurance, food stamps, and the Earned Income Tax Credit would also positively impact all three focus areas. In addition to increasing job retention, thus reducing employer job turnover, research shows that these income supplements provide work, income, education, and health benefits to recipients and their children. And recent research suggests the income from the Earned Income Tax Credits leads to benefits at virtually every stage of life –( that children in families receiving larger credits do better in school, are more likely to attend college, and can be expected to earn more as adults.)

While Ohio does have a tax credit, it is one of the weakest in the nation. Changes that would make it more effective include:

- **Making it refundable:** (all but 4 other state EITCs are refundable, so the lowest-income working families can benefit).
- **Making it larger:** (The average refundable state credit is 16% of the federal credit, which is above Ohio's rate.)
- **Eliminating the cap:** (The Ohio credit cap detracts from the work incentives and keeps it from helping those working their way into the middle class.)

**What can we learn from other communities about the most effective ways to assist individuals and families to achieve income / housing stability?**

Income and housing stability are inextricably linked – income policy *IS* housing policy. The US Department of Housing & Urban Development’s analysis of worst case housing needs finds that 80% of the problem is not housing inadequacy or overcrowding but affordability. The solution to achieving both income and housing stability is two-fold and calls for both increasing the supply and development of affordable housing and for increasing individual household’s income so that housing *is* more affordable.

1) **Work supports**, public benefits such as food and childcare assistance, are essential for increasing low wage workers overall income. However, there is a “**cliff effect**” that occurs when a slight increase in worker wages eliminates work supports such as the child care subsidy, in effect, pushing the household back into poverty and creating a disincentive to work advancement.

Strategies that could lessen this cliff effect include:

- Better taper benefits as earned income increases;
- Increase the income ceiling for eligibility
- Stagger upper limits of income eligibility for various work supports;
- Reduce the recertification frequency requirements; and
- Increase the income level for initial eligibility to allow families to qualify

2) Some states, including Maryland and Michigan, have enacted a **state renter’s credit** that provides limited tax credit to renters, similar to a homeowners mortgage interest deduction or homestead exemption. (Maryland, Michigan)

3) In Cincinnati, the Cornerstone Corporation for Shared Equity finances, develops and manages affordable apartment housing with **Renter Equity**. Cornerstone offers financial incentives to stable low-income residents who make timely rent payments, participate in the resident community and help maintain the properties. In turn, Cornerstone returns some of the turnover and maintenance-related savings to residents in the form of payments into an equity account. The accounts are vested after five years, at which point they could be worth up to \$4,137. So long as they are fulfilling their rental commitments, residents may request loans from Cornerstone’s loan fund in order to purchase a large household appliance such as a washer or dryer or cover a financial emergency.

FINALLY,

4) **Expand pool of temporary rent subsidies**, on a declining scale as a household’s income increases, to help people leave homelessness and remain stably housed.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology has calculated that a living wage in Montgomery County is \$16,723 per year for a single adult and \$46,155 per year for a one parent, two child family. Approximately 35,643 households, or 26.4% of the households in Montgomery County, earn less than a living wage. How do we help people increase their income so they're earning at least a living wage?

The focus should be on practices that improve job retention and advancement. A study by a professor of Public Policy at Georgetown University evaluated the effectiveness of various workforce development programs and found promising approaches in three categories: **Sectoral Training Programs, Career Ladder Programs, and Incumbent Worker Programs.**

Some examples include:

AFSCME 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund, funded through the provision of 1.5% of gross payroll by participating hospitals, nursing homes and other providers in Philadelphia that provides training and career ladders for certified nursing assistants and licensed practical nurses

Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, a nonprofit association of business and unions that works in manufacturing, healthcare, construction and hospitality. Firms that join agree to develop education and training programs on-site or at community colleges and provide a payroll contribution. In return, they receive technical assistance to strengthen technology and workplace practices, improve the skills of incumbent workers and recruit and train new workers (100 employers, 60,000 workers)

**Two other innovative projects** that have proven successful at raising income are **Opportunity Chicago**, which targets public housing residents and provides them with an array of services including transitional jobs, job-readiness, contextualized literacy programs and special skills training in five high-demand sectors: energy efficiency, healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing, and technology and the **Roberts Enterprise Development Fund**, a venture philanthropy organization with a dual mission: to generate job opportunities for people with significant barriers to employment and to generate profit to support other social undertakings. Employees receive training and job experience, initially through a transitional jobs model, and businesses receive capacity building assistance and facilitate greater social enterprise investment.

Finally, we should **support an increase in the minimum wage** and work to create more opportunities for full-, rather than part-, time employment. The productivity of Ohio workers grew 67% between 1979 and 2013, at the same time that median wages fell by 1% when adjusted for inflation.

QUESTION 7

**What is the rule or regulation you would eliminate today if you could and what simple change could it make? How would it impact any of our focus areas (Education and Life Skills/Health and Safety/Income and Stability)?**

A relatively simple change would be to change zoning laws. We have the ability locally to shape the housing market throughout the County through local regulatory policies. Regulations such as zoning policies, land use restrictions, development fees, subdivision design requirements, building codes, etc. help determine whether and where different types of housing can be developed. Exclusionary zoning policies such as those that ban the development of multifamily housing, duplexes, and manufactured housing or that require large lots or wide sidewalks, are barriers to the development of affordable housing. Inclusionary zoning and well-designed growth management policies can successfully expand the supply of affordable housing while keeping administrative costs low. Ideally, there would be a regional effort to do this rather than simply removing barriers on a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction basis. This would allow for a mix of regulatory tools to increase the supply of affordable, multifamily housing while also supporting other regional goals such as open space protection, economic development and urban revitalization.

I have a second, I'd like to mention, and will concede upfront that this is not really a rule or regulation but rather a widespread practice that impacts all three focus areas. I would eliminate the "box" that must be checked on most job applications asking if the applicant has a criminal history. Checking this box is a huge barrier to employment, thus all three focus areas. By eliminating the criminal history question initially, applicants would be judged solely on their qualifications. Similarly, the use of a criminal relevance matrix that looks at which convictions are relevant to particular jobs, and that could be applied by an outside organization, would increase opportunities for ex-offenders. For example, for jobs involving driving, DUI convictions are relevant and for jobs working with vulnerable populations such as children and seniors, violent crimes would be relevant. Both the City of Dayton and Montgomery County have "banned the box".

**In summary, based on everything you've heard today, in addition to the need for more funding, what would you stop, change, or add to what we're doing in the community today?**

First, as difficult as it would be, we need to stop funding programs and organizations just because we always have or because we *think* they are doing good work or are well-intentioned. Even the best strategies won't succeed if they are not implemented effectively. Policy makers should assess agencies' operating capacity and their ability to build successful partnerships and identify ways to strengthen organization capacity when needed. Clearly defined performance targets *that can be measured using data* should be established for all strategies to determine their effectiveness.

Finally, **we need to change the conversation about poverty** – away from a debate between causes vs. symptoms and away from poverty as a huge, unsolvable, amorphous blob that sits in the middle of the room because it is too big to address. The current discussion about poverty is not helpful in figuring out what the problems are, in identifying innovative solutions, or in evaluating whether any progress has been made.

Mary Jo Bane, with the Harvard Kennedy School, underscores the need for changes to the way that poverty is conceptualized to allow for a problem solving protocol that addresses the specific problems that are of concern to a community, that policy makers and community problem solvers can get their heads around, and for which success and failure can be both imagined and measured. For example, there are different problems and characteristics of the households that are grouped together as “poor” – multigenerational single parents families, working families who have fallen on hard times for a year or two, or recent immigrants – to name a few; each of which would require different policy and program responses.

We need to frame the discussion so that we can establish a consensus on specific strategies that can be implemented and measured.