

**MINNESOTA COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP  
2011 BEST PRACTICES AWARD WINNERS**

**Outstanding achievement in partnerships among supporters and providers of services to low-income people.**

*Recipient: Anoka Community Action Program, Inc.*

**Visions Implementation — Best Practice**

**The Practice:** After identifying the need for a more effective data system, Anoka County Community Action Program (ACCAP) implemented Visions, which provides the agency a cost effective and more comprehensive client database. This system accurately tracks client demographics, program enrollment, case management, outcomes, and staff activities. The benefits of Visions includes the merging of multiple databases, effectively streamlining data entry, an increase in staff productivity, a significant reduction of staff time required for reporting (on both program and agency levels), and the ongoing annual savings with the elimination of the data entry specialist. The implementation of Visions has made a substantial contribution to the agency's ability and capacity to track clients, monitor progress, evaluate programs, and achieve results.

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*Recipient: Minnesota Valley Action Council*

**Producing Social Impact through Social Enterprise — Best Practice**

**The Practice:** Embracing an agency-wide philosophy of fostering social impact through self-sustaining social enterprises. In 2004, Minnesota experienced a huge budget deficit, resulting in multiple cuts to social programs, including core funding for Community Action. Since then, demand for services have grown steadily, rather than declined. Recognizing the need for innovative programming and funding of social initiatives, MVAC launched its first social enterprise. Since then, four other social enterprises have been launched. Combined, these initiatives have created 7.6 full time jobs and generated cumulative revenue of nearly \$3.4 million.

**Outstanding achievement in partnerships among supporters and providers of services to low-income people.**

*Recipient: West Central Minnesota Communities Action*

**Progressive Food Support Outreach — Best Practice**

**The Practice:** West Central Minnesota Communities Action has partnered with the University of Minnesota Extension, United Way, Salvation Army, Head Start and the area Faith Community to increase the participation in the Food Support Programs as well as to provide education around maximizing food support dollars and while still preparing healthy family meals. Families learned about the Food Support program, how to complete an application and how to use any funds received in the most economical methods. Overall, this was a 56% increase in the number of households enrolled in the Food Support program across the five counties.

**Outstanding achievement in increasing stake and ownership by low-income people in their community.**

*Recipients:*

**West Central Minnesota Communities Action  
Lakes and Prairies Community Action Partnership  
Mahube Community Council  
Otter Tail-Wadena Community Action Council**

**The Leadership Academy — Best Practice**

**The Practice:** Too often, the full potential of leaders goes untapped. The Leadership Academy helps previously undiscovered, low income leaders realize their power and take more active roles in building their communities' future. The Academy provides a space and structure for people to acquire and practice competencies that result in becoming more effective leaders. Preliminary results are promising, indicating that participants have become more involved in their communities, are accepting formal or informal leadership positions and have become more effective community advocates.

**Outstanding achievement in partnerships among supporters and providers of services to low-income people.**

*Recipient: Community Action Duluth*

**Financial Opportunity Center: A Framework for Doing Good Business — Promising Practice**

**The Practice:** Community Action Duluth (CAD) spent the last year integrating into a Financial Opportunity Center (FOC). This bundled approach to providing services allowed our program participants to ultimately have better outcomes. The main services coordinated under the FOC are employment services and coaching, financial services and coaching, income supports and community engagement. Now the goal for participants when they enter CAD is to be provided with as many holistic, comprehensive and coordinated services as possible and to track outcomes in a cohesive unified way through the agency – unlike the previous siloed programs participants used to enroll in. Transforming our agency took vision, leadership, willingness to change, ability to evaluate and respond and perseverance to the cause. Since much of the work of personal transformation takes a long time and much of our work with participants is long-term, it's exciting that early outcomes are a testament to the power of bundled services, demonstrating that participants involved in multiple programs are truly showing better results in the areas of increasing income, improving credit score and increasing net worth. We are only more excited to report back on another year of agency integration, coordinated services and positive participant outcomes!

**Outstanding achievement in partnerships among supporters and providers of services to low-income people.**

*Recipient: Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties*

**Just-In-Time Weatherization Process — Promising Practice**

**The Practice:** Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties' Just-In-Time (JIT) weatherization process shortened home weatherization job timeframes from an average 149 days to 47 days. We analyzed each process step to determine how hours and days could be cut from home weatherization projects. We created a high level of communication between a centralized scheduler and the various teams working a job (auditor, mechanical contractor, electrician, appliance vendor, weatherization crew and inspector). The result was a switch from 78% of jobs being outside the 90-day benchmark to 78% of jobs being completed under 90 days. Additional benefits included the reduction of backlogged homes waiting for weatherization and better service to participants.

**Outstanding achievement in improving the conditions in which low-income people live.**

*Recipient: Lakes and Prairies Community Action Partnership*

**“Banking the Unbanked” through our VITA Tax Site — Promising Practice**

**The Practice:** Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership has incorporated pre-paid debit card services as a method to provide low-cost banking services to the previously unbanked. Households utilizing VITA Tax Site services were offered the opportunity to sign up for a pre-paid debit card to deposit their refund. The pre-paid debit card provides the households the ability to build savings, avoid predatory lending practices, and work toward financial security.

**Outstanding achievement in partnerships among supporters strengthening family and other supportive systems to support low-income people, especially vulnerable populations, to meet their potential.**

*Recipient: Western Community Action, Inc.*

**Community Blooms — Promising Practice**

**The Practice:** Community Blooms is a transformative model of community gardening started by Western Community Action in 2011 to address hunger and increase household funds for meeting basic needs among low-income families. Community Blooms provided nutritious food to 69 participating families, equipped participants with valuable knowledge about gardening and marketing food for resale, gave back to the community by providing 1000 pounds of surplus produce to the local food shelf, generated revenue to sustain the garden by selling a portion of the surplus produce at the local farmer's market, and created community among the 69 adults and 29 children.

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