

Wanted: Solutions for America

INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

W*anted: Solutions for America* is a two-year national research and dissemination project of the Pew Partnership. *Wanted* is based on the premise that communities across the nation have developed solutions to our country's most important challenges such as affordable housing, job preparation, and healthy children. It also assumes that:

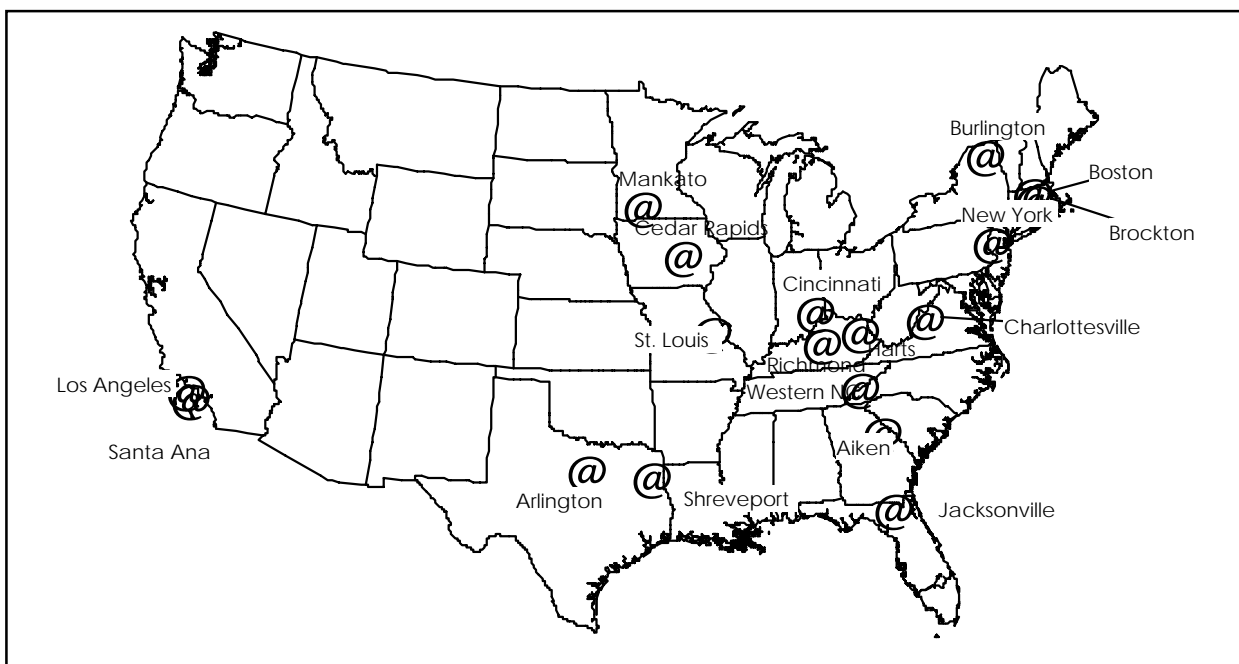
- *Practitioners* want to know how successful strategies can be adapted and implemented in their organizations;
- *Elected and government officials* want to know how to improve the quality of life where they live and work; and
- *Citizens* want to understand the variety of roles they can play in addressing issues in their communities.

However, the civic solutions so often highlighted are isolated, anecdotal snapshots that lack a convincing documentation and research component. Without more evidence and the targeted dissemination of solutions, communities faced with similar challenges are left without the necessary information to make informed decisions about effective strategies.

The *Wanted* national advisory board selected 19 of the most promising solutions from 103 applications in May 1999. Selected sites range from Los Angeles, California to Burlington, Vermont (see Figure 1) and represent a broad spectrum of issue areas (Sites and issue areas are listed in Appendix A.

Appendix B contains detailed program descriptions of the 19 sites). The *Wanted* initiative includes the development of a collaborative research design with each site by local and national researchers to document and track the specific solution over two years, the broad and accessible dissemination component of the findings, and national seminars for the sites.

Figure 1



Wanted: Solutions for America Sites

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Wanted is an innovative approach to documenting community solutions. It is a participatory action research model that builds knowledge about what works, is honest about what doesn't, and assesses the impact of a particular

approach. The following tenets guided the Pew Partnership in designing the project:

Research Standards. *Wanted* is seeking the middle ground between a comprehensive impact evaluation on one hand, and a purely anecdotal description on the other hand. *Wanted* sites will be tracked for a two-year period using a set of research questions.

Participation of Sites. *Wanted* research includes an active and participatory role for the sites. The designated local researchers and the national research team are partners with the site program staff in both the research and dissemination phases.

Benefits to Participating Sites. *Wanted* is an opportunity for the participating organizations to enhance their ability to systematically document their results and disseminate them to local and national audiences. The research and dissemination products will be of direct utility to the sites for both internal and external purposes.

Building on Community Assets. The documentation is being implemented by the 19 sites in partnership with researchers affiliated with a local or regional college or university. The expectation is that building stronger collaborative relationships between sites and local academic institutions will maximize the impact of *Wanted* beyond the initiative's lifetime and strengthen local investment in the work.

Disseminating Reliable Information on What Works. A major component of *Wanted* is the broad dissemination of the findings. This requires a strategy that includes the sites and researchers and thinks very deliberately about the kinds of information needed by the target audiences and the format that is most accessible.

GOALS and OBJECTIVES

Broadly conceived, the goal of *Wanted: Solutions for America* is to gather and disseminate promising practices related to community building and civic problem solving by simultaneously examining solutions in different issue areas operating around the country. *Wanted* responds to the burgeoning need for programs to be accountable for documenting their results with credible and reliable information and for the larger public to know what is working and why. Specific objectives of *Wanted* are:

1. To document the strategies and outcomes of the participating *Wanted* sites over the two-year period;
2. To design and test a “middle ground” research model that lies between the anecdotal and experimental;
3. To analyze findings across sites related to issue areas, processes and collaborations, and to extract common themes and lessons;
4. To disseminate practical information about successful strategies and how they may be replicated in other communities; and
5. To increase the visibility locally, regionally, and nationally, of participating programs by providing a spotlight on effective strategies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For each selected *Wanted* site, the research is being guided by four research questions:

Research Question 1: *What are the results of the program?*

This question hones in on documenting and examining outcomes for the selected *Wanted* sites and building the capacity of programs to articulate

and capture their own results. To answer this question, program staff and researchers are focusing on identifying outcomes, articulating meaningful indicators and benchmarks for their work, collecting supporting data (both quantitative and qualitative), and measuring their progress toward these goals. Each *Wanted* site has articulated site-specific research questions in this area.

Research Question 2: How does the program work?

This question aims at identifying and describing the inputs (strategies, activities, processes, etc.) that make up the program and specifying the characteristics of the intended recipients. Three considerations underscore the importance of gathering this information, particularly for the participating sites. First, describing program processes provides feedback on the quality of the program and stimulates improvement in delivery of services. Second, such data require specification of who is receiving program services and to what degree, allowing program staff to ascertain whether the program is reaching its intended audience. Third, it complements the outcome data by detailing the program's context and implementation process.

Research Question 3: What role does partnership and collaboration play in the selected programs?

The participating organizations were selected primarily for their results and secondarily, with an eye toward the degree of collaboration with other community stakeholders. This question explores the ways that the projects are embedded in their larger communities, paying particular attention to the role of collaboration with public agencies, business groups, civic associations, and citizens.

Research Question 4: *What lessons can be extracted for Wanted's audience both within and across issue areas?*

This question focuses on both the clusters of issue areas and the participating programs as a whole. Cross-case analysis will provide *Wanted* researchers with the opportunity to interpret and formulate patterns and themes related to the findings.

RESEARCH AGENDA and ACTIVITIES

With sites located across the nation, a wide breadth of issue areas, and a commitment to building on local community assets, the Pew Partnership structured the research component in a unique way. *Wanted* will enlist two teams of researchers: a national team and a local team in a hub-and-spoke model of research. While they are distinguished by their respective roles in the research process, they are interdependent.

National Research Team

Acting as the hub for the project, the national team housed at the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University leads the research effort. Specifically they are responsible for developing the blueprint research design; coordinating and providing technical assistance to the local researchers; supervising collection of standardized data; and analyzing and synthesizing the data across the selected sites.

Local Research Partners

The local research team is responsible for tailoring and implementing the general research design to the selected sites over the two years. They will also work with the sites on collecting data and serve as technical advisers to site staff over the course of the initiative. The Pew Partnership worked with

the sites to select a local researcher and contracted with them on an individual basis. Appendix C lists the national and local research partners.

Research Design

The strategies used by the researchers and site staff are interactive and collaborative. Instead of a research team collecting data from the participating organizations, *Wanted* researchers are providing technical assistance to each of the selected organizations. Each site and local research team has developed a research plan that outlines specific research questions, outcomes to be tracked, and data collection methodologies. Appendix D outlines the various research tools being used by the 19 sites.

Thus the actual documentation is not being done for the participating organizations, but rather is providing an opportunity for the organizations to play a proactive role in measuring their own successes, with access to and guidance from an outside research team. This collaboration will maximize the capacity within each of the participating organizations to document and monitor its progress in the future. The research efforts have also been designed to collect information in a way that is beneficial to the local organizations externally and internally. Ideally, the documentation process is one that the organizations can use for other reporting requirements they may have with partners and/or funders, and will provide an opportunity for reflecting on past progress and future direction.

Learning About Success and Failures

At its core, *Wanted: Solutions for America* is an attempt to go beyond proposal language, anecdotes, and hoped-for results, to talk candidly and credibly about the kinds of interventions that actually work. The issues *Wanted* sites are addressing are not three year or five year interventions, in

many cases they are generational concerns. The magnitude of the challenges—youth health, family stability, and race relations—needs a new lens for learning. *Wanted* is that lens.

At the end of the day, there should be some certainty that particular processes, partnerships, and interventions are more effective than others in the addressing an issue. Will these approaches work every time and in every place? We won't know for sure. But we will have enough evidence to say that over a period of time in one or several communities, something worked or it didn't.

The ability to know what works does not begin and end in the black hole of maybe. Rather, the direct documentation produced by each of the *Wanted* sites coupled with the research and evaluation of other initiatives, should paint a clearer picture of where to start and where to change for organizations, policymakers, and citizens as they are about the task of improving communities.

Appendix A

Wanted: Solutions for America Sites

Aiken, SC: *Growing into Life—A Healthy Community Collaborative* (infant mortality)

Arlington, TX: *Dental Health for Arlington* (access to dental services)

Boston, MA: *Boston Main Streets* (commercial revitalization)

Brockton, MA: *Massachusetts Youth Teenage Unemployment Reduction Network* (job training)

Burlington, VT: *Burlington Ecumenical Action Ministry* (microenterprise development)

Cedar Rapids, IA: *Neighborhood Transportation Services* (job linkages)

Charlottesville, VA: *Downtown Revitalization Project* (commercial revitalization)

Cincinnati, OH: *Cincinnati Youth Collaborative* (youth mentoring)

Harts, WV: *Step by Step, Inc.* (education)

Jacksonville, FL: *The Bridge of Northeast Florida* (teen pregnancy)

Jacksonville, FL: *Jacksonville Community Council, Inc.* (issue analysis)

Los Angeles, CA: *Beyond Shelter* (homelessness)

Mankato, MN: *Region Nine Healthy Communities Network* (teen drug and alcohol use)

New York, NY: *Children's Aid Society/Milbank Project* (comprehensive neighborhood revitalization)

Richmond, KY: *Kentucky River Foothills Development Council* (job training)

Santa Ana, CA: *Taller San Jose* (job training)

Shreveport, LA: *Shreveport Community Renewal* (neighborhood revitalization)

St. Louis, MO: *Focus St. Louis* (community dialogue)

Western North Carolina: *HandMade in America* (small town revitalization)

Appendix C

Research Teams

National—Center for Urban Policy Research (CUPR), Rutgers University

Dr. Norman Glickman, Director, CUPR

Dr. Sean DiGiovanna, Assistant Research Professor and Project Lead

Dr. Robert Lake, Professor and Associate Director, CUPR

Mr. Stephen Finn, Assistant Research Professor

Ms. Donita Devance-Manzini, Research Associate

Mr. Mark Pendas, Research Assistant

Ms. Deborah Visser, principal of Visser and Associates

Local

Aiken, SC (*Growing into Life*)—Dr. Lovely Ulmer-Sottong, Director, Institutional Research and Assessment, University of South Carolina-Aiken

Arlington, TX (*Dental Health for Arlington*)—Dr. Carolyn L. Cason, Associate Dean for Research, University of Texas at Arlington

Boston, MA (*Boston Main Streets*)—Mr. Karl F. Seidman, President, Karl F. Seidman Consulting Services and Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Brockton, MA (*Massachusetts Youth Teenage Unemployment Reduction Network*)—Dr. Dina M. Carbonell, Assistant Professor, Bridgewater State College; Dr. Lucinda King-Frode, Associate Professor, Bridgewater State College; and Dr. Anna C. Martin-Jearld, Professor and Chair, Social Work, Bridgewater State College

Burlington, VT (*Burlington Ecumenical Action Ministry*)—Dr. Jane Kolodinsky, Professor, Community Development and Applied Economics, University of Vermont

Cedar Rapids, IA (*Neighborhood Transportation Services*)—Mr. John Rogers, Professor, Mount Mercy College

Charlottesville, VA (*Downtown Revitalization Project*)—Dr. William H. Lucy, Associate Dean for Academics, Architecture School, University of Virginia

Cincinnati, OH (*Cincinnati Youth Collaborative*)—Dr. C. Anne Broussard, Assistant Professor, Department of Family Studies and Social Work, Miami University; Dr. Gerri Susan Mosley-Howard, Associate Dean, School of Education and Allied Professions, Miami University; and Dr. Anita Roychoudhury, Associate Professor, Teacher Education, Miami University

Harts, WV (*Step by Step, Inc.*)—Dr. Paul A. Leary, Professor of Leadership Studies, Marshall University Graduate College and Dr. Patrick Nestor, Extension Specialist, West Virginia University

Jacksonville, FL (*The Bridge of Northeast Florida and Jacksonville Community Council, Inc.*)—Mr. Timothy Cheney, Coordinator of Data and Analysis, University of Northeast Florida Center for Community Initiatives and Dr. Jeffrey A. Will, Director, University of Northeast Florida Center for Community Initiatives

Jacksonville, FL (*Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI)*)—Ms. Leslie L. Kirkwood, President, Urban Dynamics Corporation and Mr. Rick Kirkwood, Vice President, Urban Dynamics Corporation

Los Angeles, CA (*Beyond Shelter*)—Dr. Madeleine R. Stoner, Professor of Social Work, University of Southern California

Mankato, MN (*Region Nine Healthy Communities Network*)—Dr. Laura L. Bloomberg, Graduate School Faculty, University of Minnesota

New York, NY (*Children's Aid Society/Milbank Project*)—Dr. Helene Clark, Director of New York Office, Association for the Study and Development of Community; Ms. Kathleen M. Cumiskey, City University of New York Graduate Center; and Mr. Robert Engle, Environmental Psychology Program, City University of New York

Richmond, KY (*Kentucky River Foothills Development Council*)—Dr. Thomas Boyd, Chair, Sociology Department, Berea College

Santa Ana, CA (*Taller San Jose*)—Dr. Olivia de la Rocha, Research Support Services,
California State University at Long Beach

Shreveport, LA (*Shreveport Community Renewal*)—Dr. Norman Dolch, Professor of
Social Services, Louisiana State University-Shreveport

St. Louis, MO (*Focus St. Louis*)—Dr. George J. McCall, Professor of Sociology,
University of Missouri-St. Louis

Western North Carolina (*HandMade in America*)—Ms. Leslie Anderson, Lesline Anderson
Consulting; Ms. Margaret Carlson, Assistant Professor of Management and Government,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and Ms. Anne Davidison, Lecturer, Public
Management and Government, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Appendix D

Research Tool Matrix

SITE NAME	FOCUS GROUPS	SURVEYS/ QUESTIONNAIRES	INTERVIEWS	FILE/RECORDS REVIEW	EXTERNAL DATA	STATISTICAL ANALYSIS	ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM SCALE	OTHER METHODS	OTHER SCALING
Aiken		✓	✓			✓		✓	
Arlington			✓	✓					
Boston	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Brockton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Burlington	✓	✓		✓					
Cedar Rapids		✓	✓	✓					
Charlottesville	✓	✓	✓		✓				
Cincinnati			✓	✓					✓
Harts		✓	✓					✓	✓
Jacksonville (Bridge)	✓	✓		✓					
Jacksonville (JCCI)	✓	✓		✓	✓				
Los Angeles				✓			✓		✓
Mankato	✓	✓	✓	✓					
New York City	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Richmond	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓
Santa Ana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Shreveport		✓		✓				✓	✓
St. Louis	✓	✓	✓	✓					
W. North Carolina		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	

