

aha! Process, Inc.

A Platform for Economic Justice

In the 1990s Dr. Ruby K. Payne introduced a language about poverty and economic justice. Her practical reflections about economic environments, the hidden rules of class that arise from those environments, and her definition of resources broadened our collective outlook. It was a language from which we at *aha! Process, Inc.* and those of you in schools and other community groups began to distill a set of practical tools for ending poverty and building prosperity. With new insights arising from this new language, we built relationships of mutual respect across class lines, improved the way we designed our programs, raised student achievement, developed better service delivery models, and began to address systemic issues.

The *aha! Process* approach is participatory. Our experience has been that people who understand the *aha!* methodologies develop an enthusiastic desire to help create new solutions that surpasses political positions. This personal response is increasingly mirrored in communities across the United States. We continue down this road as the conditions of the working poor and people in deep poverty worsen and bring a new urgency to our work.¹

The staff and consultants at *aha! Process*, like other communities that address poverty, come from all points on the political spectrum. Some focus on individual responsibility, some on community access, and some on the need for systemic change. All of our voices are heard in the Platform for Economic Justice that follows. The platform is made up of 12 elements on which we have reached consensus—consensus about what has worked and what remains to be done. Thus the platform combines a description of what is already occurring in some places with themes that will guide our work in the coming decade. The platform is not intended to be a full explanation of *aha!* methodologies. Those who are new to *aha!* are

invited to visit our website for more information. The platform is built around problematic patterns that occur over and over in our communities—that is, in our schools, agencies, businesses, and civic and religious groups. The existing or proposed solutions to the problematic aspect of each pattern are described in a way that we hope will enable any community, whether already a member of the *aha! Process* network or not, to apply them to suit its own unique history, conditions, and people. True to one of our own methodologies, most “planks” are accompanied by at least one graphic “mental model.” The mental models will not be described here in detail but nevertheless serve as an icon for those who are familiar with our work.

Each of 12 planks is presented using the same pattern:²

- Describing a recurring, predictable theme or problem.
- Presenting a platform element in **bold**.
- Providing, as appropriate, mental models as icons for the discussion.³
- Outlining a solution that points to what we call a “future story,” a vision of what might be.

Those of us who share this work know that it transforms lives—not only the lives of people who are working to build their resources for a better life, but everyone involved in the process. It is transforming because it changes relationships: Instead of the middle class dispensing solutions

¹McClatchy Newspapers (February 23, 2007). Pugh, Tony. U.S. economy leaving record numbers in severe poverty.

²Alexander, Christopher, Ishikawa, Sara, & Silverstein, Murray. (1977). *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

³The mental models in this platform were created primarily by Phil DeVol; Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D.; and Jodi Pfarr. Dr. Payne, president of *aha! Process, Inc.*, is author of *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (1996, 2005). Payne, DeVol, and Terie Dreussi Smith co-authored *Bridges Out of Poverty* (2001, 2006); DeVol also wrote *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World* (2004). Writing the *aha! Process* platform were Payne and DeVol.

to people in poverty, we come together across class lines to solve problems. It is transforming, relevant, and meaningful because it is based on the concrete experiences of those who are in poverty. It is transforming because it is inclusive of everyone; we all own it.

1. Poverty is experienced at the personal level. Scarcity and competition for basic resources affects people at a deeply personal level. Scarcity and the resulting unstable economic environment demand that we attend to solving immediate problems; they force us into the tyranny of the moment. Consequently, poverty requires survival skills, strategies, and the use of hidden rules that are different from those used by people who live in more stable economic environments.

***aha! Process* believes the personal impact of poverty is lessened when we and those with whom we relate become consciously aware of poverty's hidden rules and general patterns—and when we gain access to a language that can articulate the experience and make it understood.**

Poverty affects us at many levels—institutional, communal, and systemic—but it is the individual who lives it day in and day out. The primary concern at *aha! Process* is the effect of poverty on the lives of individuals.

Organizations and communities that use *aha! Process* methodologies learn about poverty from people who are in poverty. The mental model below, developed first by people in poverty, is an icon for an unstable economic environment where

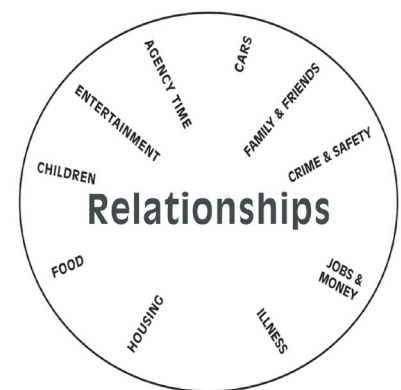
RECURRING, PREDICTABLE PATTERNS	PLATFORM STATEMENTS
1. Poverty is experienced at the personal level.	<i>aha! Process</i> believes the personal impact of poverty is lessened when we and those with whom we relate become consciously aware of poverty's hidden rules and general patterns—and when we gain access to a language that can articulate the experience and make it understood.
2. Poverty is accepted and tolerated	<i>aha! Process</i> believes poverty is an economic model that is no longer viable for communities. <i>aha!</i> is committed to ending poverty, building prosperity, and creating sustainable communities.
3. Researchers have typically examined poverty through the lenses of race, diversity, and gender—and use a definition of poverty that is outdated.	<i>aha! Process</i> believes its principal contribution to the discourse on poverty is the lens of economic class. <i>aha!</i> defines poverty not by financial measures alone but by the extent to which a person does without resources.
4. In the U.S. we are confused about the causes of poverty, so we are confused about what to do about it.	<i>aha! Process</i> believes perceptions of blame and victimization inevitably polarize communities more than they contribute to solutions. <i>aha!</i> takes a holistic approach to addressing poverty, using four distinct research bases to identify solutions.
5. People in poverty are rarely included in community planning, even for programs and initiatives that directly affect them.	<i>aha! Process</i> believes individuals in poverty are problem solvers. <i>aha!</i> brings individuals from across class lines to build social capital and develop sustainable communities.
6. The work of anti-racism is not always linked to ending poverty.	<i>aha! Process</i> believes economic justice increases racial justice and that racial justice is essential for community sustainability. Exploitation is complex and, while <i>aha!</i> keeps its focus on economic justice, it encourages communities to explore exploitations more fully. <i>aha!</i> is helping its partners make links to organizations that have the expertise to address racism systemically while remaining focused on providing access to wealth creation and other resources.

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the arithmetic of life doesn't work, where one spends most of the day solving immediate concrete problems, where future stories get lost, where survival is dependent on relationships—and from which it is very difficult to escape.

Communities can use this information about the concrete experience of poverty to explore and understand barriers to change and to solve the real problems faced by those who are trying to build a stable life.

And, just as those in middle-class institutions are provided with information about the *aha! Process* constructs, people in poverty are provided with the



Poverty

same information in *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World*—an investigative workbook and process designed for that purpose.

Our work of building economic stability is based on developing relationships of mutual respect. Knowledge of hidden rules of economic class can change the dynamic of interactions between people. When people in poverty and people from other economic classes come together to deal with real problems, the experience can be transformed from “doing to” and “doing for” to “doing with.”⁴

2. Poverty is accepted and tolerated. Poverty is accepted as inevitable by many. It competes for attention in the field of human suffering with war, pollution, racism, poor healthcare, and many other social problems. It is easy, even for people who work in anti-poverty programs, to think that poverty is simply unavoidable. Added to this is the tendency to work on one’s own piece of the puzzle, only occasionally looking up to see that many of us are still in poverty.

The mindsets of inevitability and inaccurate mental models of what poverty is really like help to hold economic disparity in place.

aha! Process believes poverty is an economic model that is no longer viable for communities. aha! is committed to ending poverty, building prosperity, and creating sustainable communities.

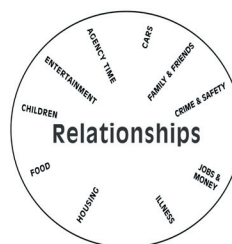
Communities that use *aha! Process* methodologies create mental models of economic environments so their plans can be based on shared and accurate

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RECURRING, PREDICTABLE PATTERNS	PLATFORM STATEMENTS
7. Current community efforts are fragmented; they educate only parts of the community and expect service providers to end poverty.	<i>aha! Process believes economic justice requires a systemic approach that must integrate and educate all components of the community, so that all can have a common language for pursuing solutions.</i>
8. Children bear the ultimate brunt of poverty.	<i>aha! Process believes access to good educational opportunities and to nurturing, caring adults can lessen the impact of poverty on children now and into the future.</i>
9. Health, mental illness, disability, addiction, and biochemical issues complicate lives and contribute to poverty.	<i>aha! Process believes working with the medical community to provide understanding and mental models for both providers and clients is an indispensable element in addressing poverty.</i>
10. Businesses that could play an important role in creating community stability are not attracted to communities with high levels of poverty.	<i>aha! Process believes it is important to continue to expand its work with the business sector to provide employers with the workforce they need, to improve retention rates, and to provide employees with good wages and benefits.</i>
11. Current policies and interventions provide low-impact piecemeal services to people in poverty and are not intentional about helping people out of poverty.	<i>aha! Process believes it must continue to assist organizations and communities in developing sophisticated service delivery models. aha! continues to work toward systemic change through high-impact community engagement strategies. aha! is building partnerships with innovators in all sectors that share a commitment to economic justice and community well-being.</i>
12. Communities that already “own” <i>aha! Process</i> constructs are looking for information that is relevant, actionable, and based on experience.	<i>aha! Process believes in encouraging and supporting knowledge transfer between itself and community partners. aha! is helping to identify the practices, tools, resources, and evaluation instruments that assist with transition and develop sustainable communities.</i>

information. By comparing and contrasting the three economic environments for stability, time horizons, problem-solving strategies, and power, planners can better articulate the need to stabilize the environment so that people in poverty can attend to the work of building resources. Mental models also will identify the strengths that people from different backgrounds can contribute to finding solutions and explain where the hidden rules of class come from—all of this for the purpose of giving communities a way to talk about poverty, economic justice, and ways to build sustainable communities in which everyone prospers.

Economic Environments



Poverty



Middle Class



Wealth

3. Researchers have typically examined poverty through the lenses of race, diversity, and gender—and use a definition of poverty that is outdated.⁵ As a result, there is a tendency for anti-poverty legislation and programs to tilt toward ending discrimination and building tolerance for diversity. Many initiatives miss the subtlety that ending unequal treatment based on national origin, race, or gender is not the same as ending poverty.⁶ In addition, the outdated definition of poverty causes confusion about the true state of poverty in the U.S.

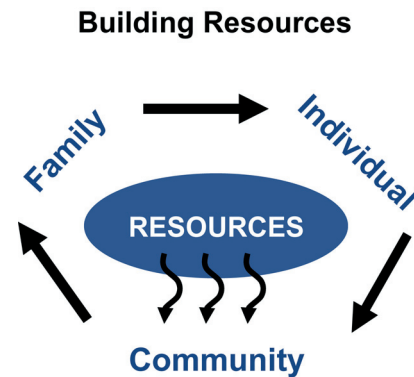
***aha! Process* believes its principal contribution to the discourse on poverty is the lens of economic class. *aha!* defines poverty not by financial measures alone but by the extent to which a person does without resources.**

In the *aha!* methodology, poverty is defined as the degree to which a person does without resources; so, to get out of poverty, it is necessary to build resources. This definition allows communities to address poverty in a new way.

Getting out of poverty requires that a person first be able to stabilize the environment and then build resources of many kinds—not just financial but emotional, mental, social, spiritual, physical, role models, and knowledge of the hidden rules of all three classes.

The mental model above right indicates that the responsibility for building resources lies not only with the individual but also with the community and family. Awareness of this definition translates directly to program design and community strategies.

aha! Process methodologies apply the lens of economic class to the issues of economic justice and wealth creation. This isn't to say that *aha!* ignores the relationship between racism and poverty (see Plank 6). Diversity training and working toward individual tolerance are constructs that exist on a horizontal plane where all cultures



Source: J. Pfarr Consulting

are taken to be equal in value and are to be treated fairly. While these are necessary and important goals, they don't necessarily address economic injustice. Economic injustice exists on a vertical axis where it's understood that it's better to have economic stability than to not have economic stability. By applying the lens of economic class, even when race is an issue, the focus remains on the vertical axis: improving the economic condition of the individual.

Dr. Rita Pierson, an *aha! Process* consultant, has written that by teaching the hidden rules of wealth creation and examining the characteristics of individuals who have attained prosperity, "... we provide a window of escape for individuals who are intent on improving their economic lot." She makes the case that, in spite of systemic racism, African Americans and Hispanic Americans who have attained wealth or improved their economic lifestyle have learned those hidden rules. "Feelings and heartfelt attitudes cannot be legislated or mandated by law. The real attack on systemic racism is the improvement of our understanding of each other," she writes. "*aha! Process* promotes relationships of mutual respect across racial and

⁴DeVol, Philip E. (2004). *Facilitator Notes for Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World: Building Your Resources for a Better Life*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process.

⁵O'Connor, Alice. (2001). *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁶Michaels, Walter Benn. (2006). *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt & Company.

economic lines. Indeed, the development of these relationships has the power to reinvigorate poor communities.”

4. In the U.S. we are confused about the causes of poverty, so we are confused about what to do about it.⁷ The “victim vs. system” debate about poverty’s cause creates confusion instead of solutions.

aha! Process believes perceptions of blame and victimization inevitably polarize communities more than they contribute to solutions. aha! takes a holistic approach to addressing poverty, using four distinct research bases to identify solutions.

aha! Process frames the inquiry into the causes of poverty into four research bases: (1) the choices and behaviors of the individual; (2) human and social capital in the community; (3) exploitation; and (4) political/economic structures. *aha!* methodology holds that there is sound, informative research in each area and that all four bases must be addressed to end poverty and build communities in which everyone can prosper.

The two areas of research that receive the most attention from scholars, commentators, and politicians are at polar ends of the continuum: individual behavior at one end and political/economic structures at the other. Those who dominate the discourse have had a tendency to impose a binary, either/or construct that ignores the many complexities of poverty and the concrete realities of community life. This typically results in inconsistent legislation, since it has relied on one research base or another to form public policy. The resulting strategies, such as those that create dependency while demanding self-sufficiency, seldom work.⁸

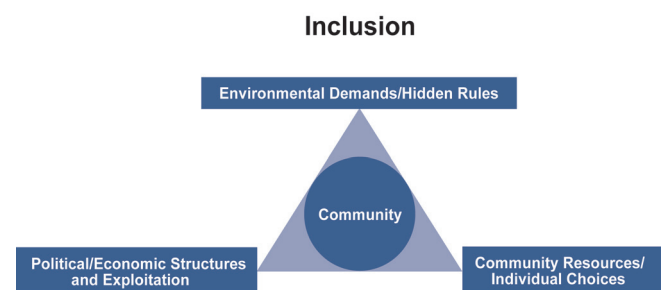
Our comprehensive approach has produced a Community Sustainability Grid that is being used by several communities as a planning tool. It prompts us to plan in ways that are wider and

deeper than the norm and to incorporate strategies clear across the spectrum—from change in individual behavior through systemic change and community engagement.

Community Sustainability Grid

	Individual Behavior	Human and Social Capital	Exploitation	Political/Economic Structures
Individual Action				
Organizational Action				
Community Action				
Policy				

aha! Process methodology is also inclusive. We shift the focus of the political debate from the two ends of the continuum to what it takes to get individuals out of poverty and build prosperous, stable communities. We give everyone the opportunity to be part of the solution. Our inclusive approach encourages people of all classes, races, and political persuasions to participate in the dialogue about ending poverty.



5. People in poverty are rarely included in community planning, even for programs and initiatives that directly affect them. This is due in part to the mindset that sees individuals in poverty as needy, deficient, diseased, and not

⁷Shipler, David K. (2004). *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

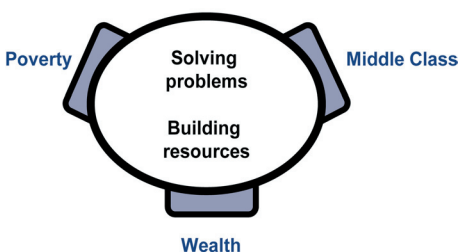
⁸McClatchy Newspapers, op. cit.

to be trusted. If people in poverty had been at the table when evacuation plans for Hurricane Katrina were being made, they would have been evacuated. Katrina serves as a metaphor for all communities. While many organizations have policies that require client participation, it's rare to find people in poverty serving on governing boards and participating fully with middle-class and wealthy people. Without the presence of the people who have to live with the programs, the systems tend to become accountable to outside entities rather than to the people being served.

aha! Process believes individuals in poverty are problem solvers. aha! brings individuals from across class lines to build social capital and develop sustainable communities.

aha! Process methodology is based on the premise that people in poverty are problem solvers. We strive to bring together people across class lines to name problems, define barriers, and search out creative solutions. Communities that use *aha!* constructs find that people in poverty provide the energy for change.

All three classes come to the decision-making table to solve community problems



When people form relationships of mutual respect, they are more likely to support each other. When people in poverty inform others about the barriers and challenges of poverty, the entire group becomes armed with concrete information that allows change at agency, community, and policy levels. For example, when people from poverty informed the Bridges Steering Committee about predatory lending practices in their city, the result was the creation of new lending practices at the

local credit union, new services at local banks, the hiring of an attorney to pursue predatory lenders, and discussions with legislators about enacting legislation to eliminate predatory lending practices. When people in poverty are at the planning table, not only will they be evacuated, they will help decide where to go and how to get there. And it isn't enough to simply have people in poverty at the table. Those who currently fill all the positions must be willing to move over, make room, and listen to and learn from their new partners. When everyone is involved in planning for community prosperity, it becomes transformational for all.

6. The work of anti-racism is not always linked to ending poverty. The U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave people of color more access to wealth-creating opportunities. But, more recently, anti-racism strategies have turned to correcting individual attitudes—to promote tolerance rather than to address economic disparity and eliminate systemic racism.⁹ As a result, the historical and persistent interplay of race, exploitation, and poverty continues.

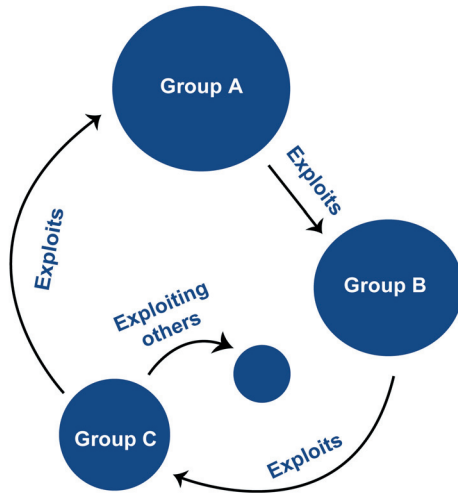
aha! Process believes economic justice increases racial justice and that racial justice is essential for community sustainability. Exploitation is complex and, while aha! keeps its focus on economic justice, it encourages communities to explore exploitations more fully. aha! is helping its partners make links to organizations that have the expertise to address racism systemically while remaining focused on providing access to wealth creation and other resources.

When communities that use *aha! Process* methodologies come together to work on economic justice, they learn from each other about how the processes for wealth creation have favored the

⁹Michaels, Walter Benn. (2006). *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt & Company.

Exploitation

As part of this system, we all take advantage of others or exploit others intentionally or unintentionally



Source: J. Pfarr Consulting

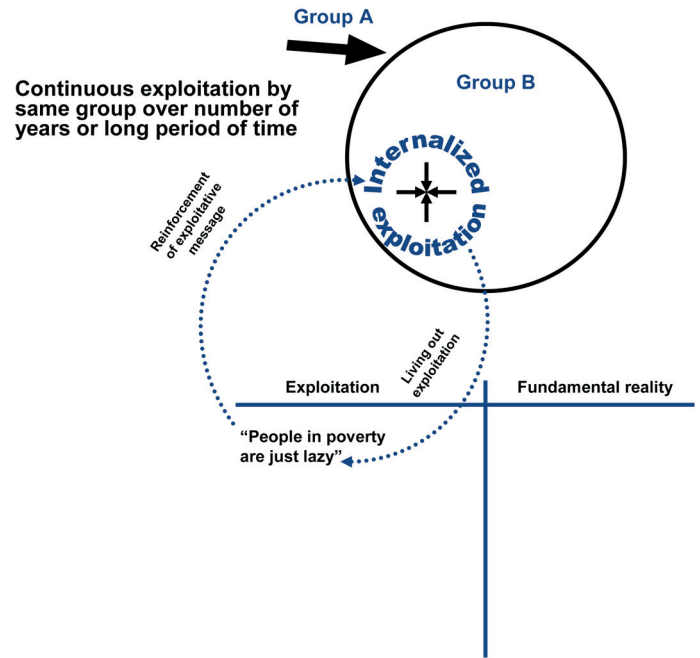
dominant race, gender, religion, and class.¹⁰ *aha!* focuses on biases and exploitive practices as they apply to people of all classes, as seen in Plank 4. When we understand how economic groups operate, we can more successfully relate to our own group, as well as to others.

The first mental model above makes the point that in our societal system we all, in some way or another, are involved in exploitation. We may be part of the group that experiences the advantages of exploitation, and we may be part of the group that is exploited. Exploitation or benefiting from advantages can be both unintentional and intentional. For example, a person is working for economic justice, but her retirement plan invests in companies that don't pay a living wage—arguably taking advantage of another group.

Organizations and communities that use *aha! Process* concepts need a way to address both external exploitation and internalized exploitation.

The second mental model is used in *aha!* communities where people from all classes address the realities of systems as they work together to

Exploitation of a Group



Source: J. Pfarr Consulting

promote economic justice. Each class must do its own work and be willing to work with the other. This means moving past anger, guilt, and blame to accountability. We must hold ourselves accountable and be willing to be accountable to others. Only then can we engage in relationships where we mutually respect each other. From that beginning, a community can come together to create economic justice and prosperity.¹¹

7. Current community efforts are fragmented; they educate only parts of the community and expect service providers to end poverty. Operating out of “silos” or compartments is a common pattern that limits problem solving to the diameter of the silo. Educators, law enforcement agencies, social service agencies, the faith community, philanthropic organizations all tend to operate in isolation. The implicit messages are: If schools are effective, students will have all the skills necessary to be

¹⁰Lui, Meizhu, Robles, Bárbara, Leondar-Wright, Betsy, Brewer, Rose, & Adamson, Rebecca. (2006). *The Color of Wealth: The Story Behind the U.S. Racial Wealth Divide*. New York, NY: The New Press.

¹¹Dreier, Peter. (March/April 1999). There's no racial justice without economic justice. *Poverty & Race*.

successful; if treatment programs are effective, people will get sober and be able to work; if the criminal justice system is effective, offenders will become productive members of society. The reality is that a social service sector, even a sophisticated one, cannot create economic opportunity or stability. But the community at large is rarely intentional about building prosperity and well-being for all. This pattern holds poverty in place.¹² Much of educational reform, for example, has centered on isolated and specific programs and strategies in schools.

***aha! Process* believes economic justice requires a systemic approach that must integrate and educate all components of the community, so that all can have a common language for pursuing solutions.**

aha! Process itself offers educators a complete set of tools for children, preschool through 12th grade. By considering a child's economic background, educators are better able to examine the why of many social and academic behaviors. While this strategy is essential—and designed to give immediate tools to educators and to improve learner performance—current research bears out that in-school programs account for only a small percentage of student growth. The integration and examination of economic factors, cultural factors, and intellectual potential allow for better educational opportunities. *aha!* advocates a broader approach that brings educational and community methodologies together in new and creative ways. This is occurring at colleges that are developing strategies to improve retention rates of students while they are in college and in the first year of employment after they leave college.

The Menominee Nation in Wisconsin is another example of the merging of *aha! Process*'s school and community initiatives. The enhanced connections between the community and schools, illustrated in the mental model above right, engage the entire community and push effectively and comprehensively toward change.

Combining Framework and Bridges

	Workshops/ Initiatives	Children/ Youth	Parents	Schools	Social Service Providers	Community
F R A M E W O R K	Framework			X		
	Learning Structures			X		
	Positive Behavior	X		X		
	Early Literacy	X	X	X	X	
	Meeting Standards & Raising Test Scores			X		
	Leadership Committee			X		
B R I D G E S	Bridges				X	X
	Applying Concepts				X	
	Getting Ahead Facilitator Training				X	
	Getting Ahead		X	X	X	
	Adolescent Treatment Program	X	X	X	X	
	Recovery School	X	X	X	X	X
	Agency Changes				X	
	Steering Committee	X	X	X	X	X

8. Children bear the ultimate brunt of poverty. In the United States, children have one of the highest poverty rates of any group. Because they cannot vote and are not allowed to work outside the home until their mid-teens, children are highly dependent on the adults in their household for food, shelter, and care. Poor children in the U.S. have few rights and little advocacy. The effect of this reality often lasts a lifetime and, too often, has consequences seen into the next generation.

¹²A recent paper identifies three more patterns that must be addressed by schools and communities together. They are (1) the wide disparity in literacy and numeracy skills among school-age and adult populations; (2) the changes in our economy that have created new sources of wealth and a shift in balance between capital and labor; and (3) sweeping demographic changes, with our population growing older and more diverse. The authors note that, if not addressed immediately, these three forces will cause us to grow apart with greater inequality in wages and wealth, along with increased social and political polarization. See Kirsch, Irwin, Braun, Henry, & Yamamoto, Kentaro. (January 2007). *America's perfect storm: three forces changing our nation's future*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

aha! Process believes access to good educational opportunities and to nurturing, caring adults can lessen the impact of poverty on children now and into the future.

There are four basic reasons an individual will leave poverty—whether as a teenager or an adult: too painful to stay, a key relationship, a vision or a goal, a talent or a skill. All of these (except the first) can be developed through relationships or schools. Consequently, strong educational opportunities and nurturing adults are keys to this set of transition catalysts. *aha! Process* is involved in building an understanding of this opportunity among both teachers and students, as well as in providing the instructional tools that will support the opportunity by make teaching easier and learning faster.

In addition, Dr. Payne has advocated a Children's Bill of Rights that includes a right to a safe, violence-free environment; a right to quality time with at least one nurturing, caring adult; a right to have food every day; and a right to have shelter every night.

9. Health, mental illness, disability, addiction, and biochemical issues complicate lives and contribute to poverty.

The correlation between the environment of poverty and stress-related illnesses and depression is well-established.¹³ Poverty generates ill health, and ill health generates poverty. In every aspect of healthcare, from being sick to getting care, from prevention to aftercare, people in poverty don't fare as well as people in middle class or wealth. Healthcare providers report that many of their entry-level healthcare employees are living in unstable environments that negatively impact work performance. These providers struggle with complex service delivery issues that affect not only the direct care of patients but their own workforce.

aha! Process believes working with the medical community to provide understanding and mental models for both

providers and clients is an indispensable element in addressing poverty.

Healthcare organizations use *aha! Process* methodologies at various levels—employee retention and work performance, training and development, and patient education and care. Several healthcare organizations have begun the work of learning and applying *aha!* concepts. For example, in northeastern Ohio a consortium of educators and healthcare organizations is offering *aha!*'s Getting Ahead workgroups to employees while developing systems of support for those in transition; medical schools are teaching *aha!* concepts to physicians; and doctors are exploring ways to communicate differently with patients to improve compliance with treatment plans.

10. Businesses that could play an important role in creating community stability are not attracted to communities with high levels of poverty. Communities are struggling to create or maintain a positive business climate, but paradoxical forces are at work. The global economy has created a strong national economy with a simultaneously widening disparity in income and wealth. The global economy has accelerated the disparity between the wealthy and the poor in two ways: the ability of employers to outsource lower-skilled jobs to other countries, plus a heavy demand for highly educated workers.

aha! Process believes it is important to continue to expand its work with the business sector to provide employers with the workforce they need, to improve retention rates, and to provide employees with good wages and benefits.

Businesses that employ people from poverty are concerned about the skill level of new hires, turnover rates, cost of turnover, cost per hire,

¹³Sapolsky, Robert M. (1998) *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers: An Updated Guide to Stress, Stress-Related Diseases, and Coping*. New York, NY: W.H. Freeman & Company.

absentee rates, and how to improve productivity. Employees are concerned about transportation, childcare, healthcare, paying bills, housing, family stressors, and being treated with respect. *aha! Process* methodologies are uniquely positioned to help both employers and employees.

In the mental model at right, “Business Action” has been added to the Community Sustainability Grid we first set out in Plank 4.

The challenges and patterns that exist in the for-profit sector have parallels in the non-profit and governmental sectors. For example, those in poverty often enter the workforce through the social service agencies that once served them; but many social sector employers—even some anti-poverty programs—pay poverty wages. All “business” owners, even non-profit entities, are encouraged to consider their role in interacting more positively with employees to build resources.

In Vermont, *aha! Process* workshops with the business community led to partnerships between the United Way and an association of human resource professionals. Working groups have been formed to address training and development, employee benefits, financial assistance, access to community and state resources, employee support, policy review and change, and collaboration with other employers.

There are businesses that have applied *aha! Process* methodologies successfully and serve as models and learning centers for others.

11. Current policies and interventions provide low-impact piecemeal services to people in poverty and are not intentional about helping people out of poverty.¹⁴

Most programs provide limited access to limited support for a short period of time and don’t assess the resources necessary for a transition out of poverty.¹⁵ Thus people who begin to make the transition find that the very supports that are necessary (for example, childcare, assistance with

**Business Interests’
Community Sustainability Grid**

	Individual Behavior	Human and Social Capital	Exploitation	Political/Economic Structures
Individual Action				
Organization Action				
Business Action				
Community Action				
Policy				

transportation, and health insurance) are pulled out just as the journey begins. People in poverty have difficulty getting access to jobs that pay well, a good education, effective healthcare, and fair credit. They receive little concrete support for the process of transition.

Each organization in the service delivery system may be doing wonderful and much-needed work; but the net effect holds people in poverty. For example, some people whose time limit for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) has run out are entering the pool of permanent poverty.¹⁶

***aha! Process* believes it must continue to assist organizations and communities in developing sophisticated service delivery models. *aha!* continues to work toward systemic change through high-impact community engagement strategies. *aha!* is building partnerships with innovators in all sectors that share a commitment to economic justice and community well-being.**

¹⁴Miller, Scott D. (2007). *Until It’s Gone: Ending Poverty in Our Nation in Our Lifetime*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process.

¹⁵Hebel, Sara. (March 23, 2007). The graduation gap. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com>.

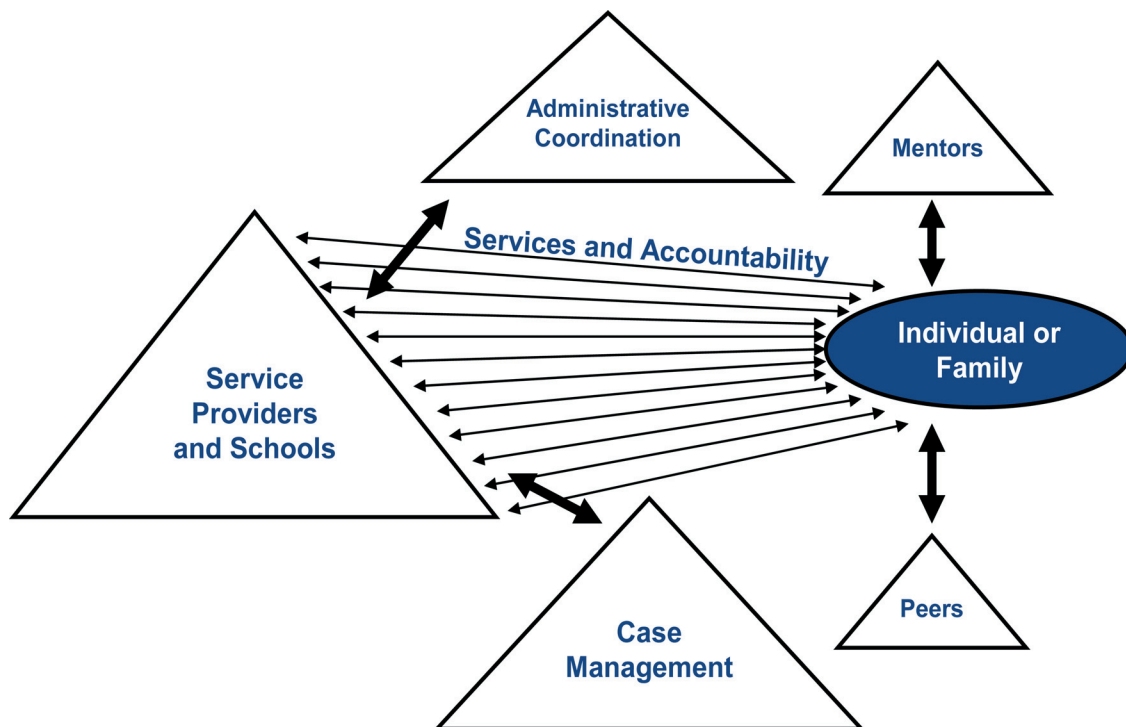
¹⁶McClatchy Newspapers, op. cit.

Agencies that apply *aha! Process* methodologies typically begin by using the information to improve relationships with their clients. As relationships improve, the focus shifts to changing policies, procedures, and program designs. The next step is to ask other service providers to use the constructs, thus widening the effectiveness and impact of the strategies. Communities need sophisticated service delivery models to meet the needs of its members.

A good mental model (below) has been developed by Move the Mountain (MTM) Leadership Center. Its primary triangle represents all organizations and activities managed by providers. The additional triangles marked Administrative Coordination, Case Management, Peers, and Mentors are all necessary add-ons that enhance the service delivery system. In communities where administrators work cooperatively, they can plan, budget, and evaluate their work to streamline and coordinate services. They can work across systems to help families in holistic ways and add new services more easily.

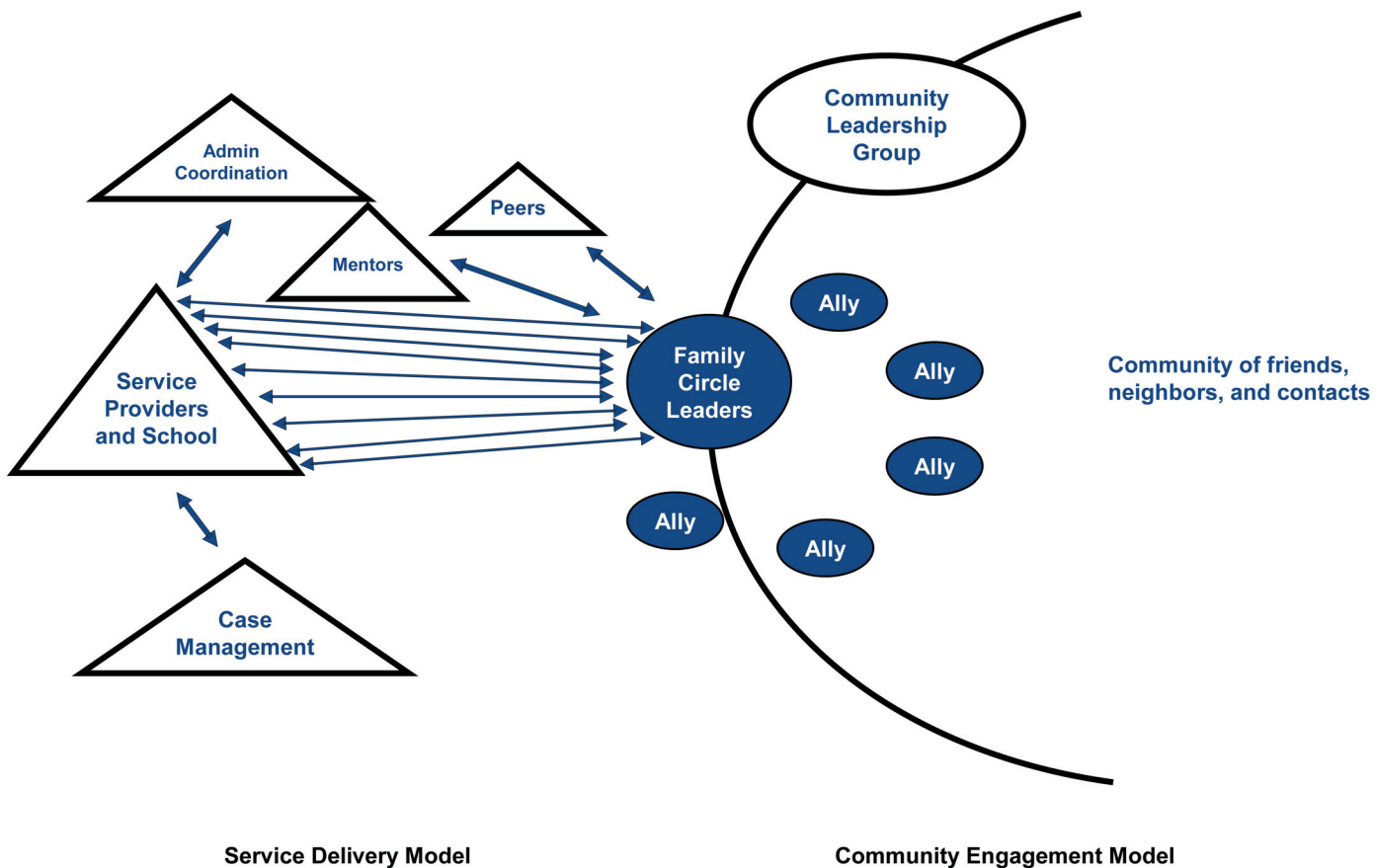
aha! Process is working with teams made up of representatives from the service provider's client base and staff, other service providers, community members, and policymakers to develop ways to apply the new constructs. The team investigates the concrete experience of the client, develops solutions, and evaluates best practices and policies from other communities and disciplines. It then develops its own strategies to implement and test.

In addition to building sophisticated service delivery models, *aha! Process* methodologies assist in the development of community engagement models. After all, service providers alone cannot build prosperous communities; it takes all sectors and requires partnerships with local and national organizations. In the model that follows, the community, represented by the half circle, has been added to the service delivery model. It is this community—made up of businesses, elected officials, civic organizations, and faith-based entities—that must be engaged.



Source: Move the Mountain Leadership Center

Community Engagement Model



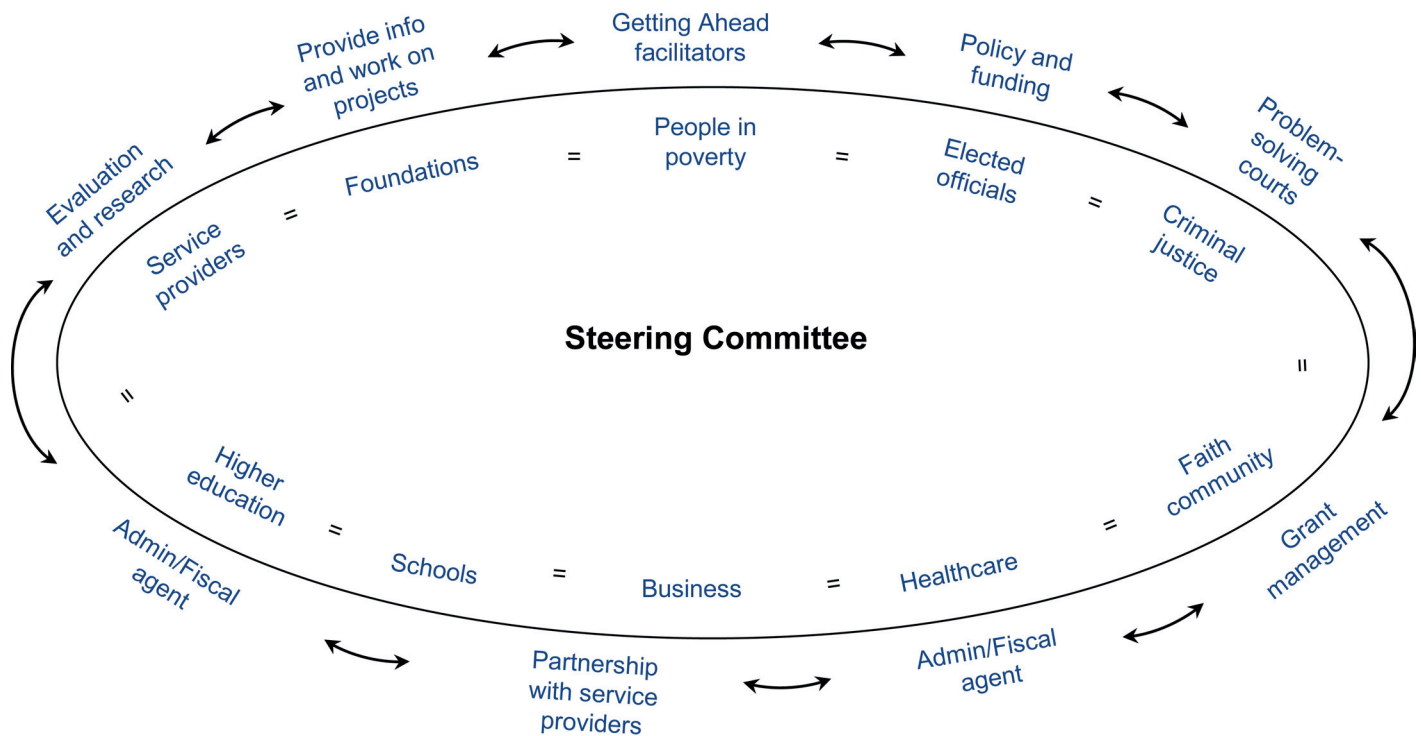
The model above reflects the Circles Campaign initiated by a partnership of MTM, Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), and *aha! Process*. MTM began this high-impact strategy, which brings people from all classes and races into “circles” to support the transition of individuals and families out of poverty. The Circle leader is a person from poverty; the other Circle members are called allies. The information and insights from the *aha!* publication *Bridges Out of Poverty* help Circle leaders and allies build relationships of mutual respect.

While the Circles are designed to build social capital and address all the causes of poverty, WOW focuses on gender issues and offers four programs that enhance resources. The Self-Sufficiency Standard that is being used to change policies at the national level is one of WOW’s four programs. The initial goal of the Circles Campaign is to

study the barriers and successes of the first 1,000 Circles, then fine-tune the model before taking the campaign to 1,000 communities.

aha! Process methodologies include guiding principles and an organizational structure that (1) brings all classes and races to the decision-making table, (2) applies strategies that cover all causes of poverty, (3) is mutually accountable to its members and community, (4) provides ownership of the work to everyone at the table, and (5) works to expand the partnership to build sustainable communities through attraction.

Communities that are leading the way are finding that the organizational structure needs to have five elements: (1) a steering committee where shared plans and decisions are made; (2) a coordinator to manage the work of the group; (3) if needed, more than one administrative or fiscal agent to manage



different funding streams and projects; (4) a simple and fast way of communicating; and (5) shared evaluation, research, and quality-improvement activities.

12. Communities that already “own” *aha! Process* constructs are looking for information that is relevant, actionable, and based on experience. Our partners in organizations and communities report that they understand *aha!* principles for change, but they sometimes struggle to find ways to apply them.

***aha! Process* believes in encouraging and supporting knowledge transfer between itself and community partners. *aha!* is helping to identify the practices, tools, resources, and evaluation instruments that assist with transition and develop sustainable communities.**

The first step in the transfer of the knowledge—the core concepts and principles or tacit knowledge—is complete. With the exception of schools, where *aha! Process* has developed many specific tools and strategies, the second step, that of concrete application or explicit knowledge, is just beginning.¹⁷

In social service, healthcare, business, and other non-school organizations where *aha! Process* methodologies have been applied, there are three patterns for the transfer of knowledge: (1) Some organizations and communities that utilize the *aha!* model become champions; their ownership of *aha!* knowledge, coupled with the best practices of their own field or discipline, produces a learning center for others. (2) Other organizations have developed models based in part on *aha!* concepts

¹⁷Chermack, J. Thomas. (Spring 2003). The role of scenarios in altering mental models and building organizational knowledge. *Futures Research Quarterly*.



works with schools, agencies, and communities to achieve critical mass and begin applying the concepts. Each discipline/organization adds the best thinking and practices of its own field to develop and test strategies and models. The expansion of the knowledge is based on the leadership, knowledge, culture, and history of the community. The knowledge is then made available within each community and shared with others. The ownership of the knowledge is transferred back and forth between *aha!* and the organization and the community. *aha!* assists with the transfer by offering new products, online support, conferences, and partnerships.

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and are conducting independent research that will eventually enhance the transfer of knowledge to others. And (3) a number of communities have formed steering committees that organize and manage the training and application of *aha!* constructs for their community—and several of those communities are sharing ideas and documents with each other in informal networks.

The development of champions, research sites, and community steering committees takes time. What is needed from *aha! Process* and its partners are more concrete strategies for organizational, community, and systemic change.

Our mental model of knowledge transfer builds from the *aha! Process* concepts of economic class and justice that form a core of knowledge. *aha!*