

# Laying a Foundation for the Fight Against Poverty: Developing a Locally Relevant Poverty Measure with Community-Based Research

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## Abstract

As community-based research (CBR) is gaining recognition as a high impact practice at colleges and universities across the country, it is increasingly important to develop a repertoire of best practices. This article describes a CBR project to estimate the incomes required for various families in a local community to satisfy their basic needs without relying on government assistance. Strengths and shortcomings of the project are evaluated based on two standards of best practice in CBR, one that focuses primarily on process and one that focuses primarily on results. The article concludes with next steps and several lessons learned that are broadly applicable to the field of CBR. Special attention is given to lessons that can help align and unite best practices for process and results.

*Keywords: community-based research, CBR, poverty*



Community-based research (CBR) is gaining recognition as a high impact practice at colleges and universities across the country (Kuh, 2008; Strand et al., 2003; Weinberg, 2003). CBR provides a unique opportunity to unite the three traditional academic missions of teaching, scholarship, and service, as well as develop students' skills for both critical thinking and active citizenship. Although CBR shares many features and benefits with traditional charity-oriented service-learning, it distinguishes itself by putting students, faculty, and community partners in the role of problem solver. It not only raises awareness of social issues but forces partnerships to critically consider and address them. In this way, CBR provides a powerful tool, effecting social change while also teaching the steps in the process of social change, a key ingredient for active citizenship (Strand et al., 2003).

This article is a case study of a CBR project undertaken by the nonprofit organization Cottages of Hope (COH) and an

upper level labor economics class at Weber State University, both located in Ogden, Utah. COH provides financial literacy and workforce development programs to help families achieve greater levels of financial stability. Students used a variety of data sources to develop a locally relevant poverty measure: the Ogden Independent Living Standard. COH now uses this measure for benchmarking and goal setting with its clients, as well as for grant reporting and application purposes.

As discussed in Puma et al. (2009), the "detailed documentation and dissemination" of CBR case studies helps advance both the theory and practice of CBR. By providing such documentation as well as reflecting on the successes and shortcomings of the project and the connection between process and results, this case study contributes to the literature on best practice in CBR. The article is organized as follows: I first discuss the development of the partnership. Next is a description of the CBR project and its primary results. This is followed by a section

that identifies strengths and shortcomings, then a summary of lessons learned and next steps, as well as a discussion of implications for the field of CBR in general. The Conclusion summarizes progress and goals.

### Partnership Development

In 2015, Ogden, Utah, was nationally recognized for having the lowest income inequality of any metropolitan statistical area in the United States (Goodman, 2015). However, this finding does not reflect a lack of poverty. In 2016, 73.9% of students in Ogden School District qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, the highest rate among all school districts in Utah (Utah State Board of Education, 2016). Cottages of Hope, an Ogden nonprofit, takes a unique approach to fighting poverty. Since its establishment in 2008, it has offered free financial literacy and job training programs to help families achieve greater levels of financial stability and break the cycle of poverty.

COH has had a close relationship with Weber State University for a number of years. Several faculty and administrators have held seats on its board, and COH has participated in class projects from time to time. I met the executive directors of COH in fall 2014. My experience working with a youth financial literacy program as an AmeriCorps volunteer provided common ground. The introductory meeting revealed many shared interests and objectives, and we decided to keep in touch.

I reached out to COH again in spring 2015. This meeting led to a deeper discussion of COH's mission and programs and planted the seed of the Ogden Independent Living Standard. Earlier the previous year, COH had begun to implement the evidence-based SparkPoint model of service delivery (<https://uwba.org/sparkpoint/>) used by multiple nonprofit organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area. SparkPoint Centers focus on helping families with four main objectives:

1. Achieving a livable wage
2. Decreasing debt-to-income ratio below 40%
3. Obtaining a 650+ credit score
4. Reaching 3 to 6 months of personal savings

The last three objectives are straightforward

calculations that can easily be derived for each household. However, determining the livable wage objective is a little more difficult. A livable wage implies that a household has enough income to pay for basic needs without assistance from outside resources (e.g., government, extended family). The amount required depends on family size and composition, local cost of living, and how one defines basic needs.

Existing poverty scales do not necessarily measure a livable wage. For example, federal poverty guidelines are based on the cost and average expenditure share of food from 1965. These guidelines do not vary by geographic region within the lower 48 states. Nevertheless, the concept of a livable wage is not new. Two well-known academic organizations have pioneered livable wage measures.

First, Diana Pearce at University of Washington developed the Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS; <http://selfsufficiencystandard.org>) in 1996. Second, Amy K. Glasmeier at Massachusetts Institute of Technology developed her Living Wage Calculator (<http://livingwage.mit.edu/pages/about>) in 2004. Both standards estimate basic needs budgets that include housing, child care, food, transportation, healthcare, and miscellaneous expenses, as well as payroll taxes, federal and state income taxes, and selected credits (Nadeau, 2017; Pearce, 2015).

Over the years, the SSS has been calculated for all counties in 39 states with irregular updates on a state-by-state basis. The Living Wage Calculator estimates budgets for all counties in all 50 states with regular biannual updates. These standards differ to various extents based on the range of family types, assumptions about working parents and sources of health insurance, data sources used, and other small differences (Nadeau, 2017; Pearce, 2015).

The most recent version of Pearce's SSS for all counties in Utah is from 2001 (Pearce, 2001). At the time of my meeting with COH in 2015, the MIT Living Wage Calculator provided estimates for all Utah counties as recently as 2013. However, both existing measures provided estimates based on average cost of living at the county level. Although this is a great improvement over the federal poverty guidelines, the cost of living in Ogden, specifically housing costs, tends to be significantly lower than in sur-

rounding Weber County. This differential reflects a concentration of poverty within Ogden City and higher incomes in surrounding Weber County suburbs. In 2015, median annual household income was \$56,000 in Weber County but only \$41,000 in Ogden City (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Additionally, neither existing standard included minimal savings or entertainment budgets. (Newer versions of the SSS include emergency savings in the budget, but the budget estimates for Utah counties from 2001 did not; see Pearce, 2015.) Helping their clients develop a saving habit is a central goal for COH. The executive directors also remarked that their clients spend money on entertainment (particularly eating out) regardless of their income, and they felt any realistic and practical standard should have a minimal entertainment budget.

Due to greater familiarity with the SSS methodology, COH had been using the 2001 SSS for Weber County, adjusted for inflation with the Consumer Price Index, as the livable wage benchmark for its implementation of the SparkPoint model. However, COH ideally wanted a livable wage measure that better fit its unique geography, clientele, and program goals. With such a measure, it could help clients set more meaningful goals as well as have a better yardstick with which to evaluate its program.

Understanding and measuring poverty are important concepts in labor economics, and this seemed like an opportunity for a mutually beneficial CBR project involving a labor economics class and COH. I applied to our university's Center for Community Engaged Learning and got a labor economics course designated as a community-engaged learning (CEL) class. The newly designated CEL class was scheduled for spring semester 2016.

### Our CBR Project

The project was initiated in an upper level labor economics class with 37 students during spring semester 2016. The students were predominantly, but not exclusively, economics majors. Most of the students were unaware of the meaning of the CEL designation at the time of registration. Although the class covered a standard labor economics curriculum over the course of the semester, we started by studying how economists measure poverty. This somewhat unusual starting point was conducive

to the goals of our CEL project.

After studying the origins and drawbacks of the federal poverty line, I introduced my students to Pearce's work and her concept of a self-sufficiency standard. At the end of this introduction to poverty measurement, the executive directors of COH came to my class and gave a presentation on their idea of calculating a similar measure tailored specifically to the city of Ogden and the needs of their clientele.

After the kickoff presentation by COH, students were divided into nine groups of four to five. Following Pearce's methodology, specifically that used in her most recent report for the counties in Colorado (2015), each group was assigned one of the following budget categories:

- Housing
- Child care
- Food
- Transportation—car insurance
- Transportation—car use and maintenance
- Healthcare—insurance (including employer-sponsored insurance and insurance available through the government's healthcare marketplace, <https://www.healthcare.gov>)
- Healthcare—out-of-pocket costs
- Federal payroll taxes and state income taxes
- Federal income taxes

Miscellaneous expenses, entertainment, and savings were initially left out because we intended to estimate them as various percentages of total expenses.

The student groups were assigned to estimate the cost of their budget categories for 74 different family types that varied by the number of adults and children as well as the ages of the children. They were encouraged to use Pearce's (2015) report on Colorado as a starting point, but to tailor measures and data sources as much as possible to the locale of Ogden City. Students were required to submit a midterm report demonstrating the identification of appropriate local data sources. The midterm report was accompanied by a reflection on what they had learned so far.

Shortly after the midterm project report, I took my class on a field trip to the COH offices in downtown Ogden. None of them had been there before. We decided to take the city bus because I had asked my transportation group to also investigate the cost of public transportation, and a majority of the class had no experience with Ogden's public transportation system. Upon arrival at the COH offices, the executive directors gave my students a tour of their building and an overview of all the services they provide (financial literacy classes, help with résumé writing and job search, tax assistance, referral to local workforce development classes, and the beginning of their SparkPoint program). At the end of the field trip, students were encouraged to ask the COH directors about questions that had arisen in completing their midterm reports. We ended up having a discussion about the definition of "basic needs" and what that meant to the COH directors and their clients. Ultimately, they were looking for a budget that was frugal but also practical (included entertainment) and useful (included savings). They were looking not for a theoretical benchmark but for something that would actually be usable.

In addition to taking some small steps to advance our CEL project, I believe the field trip served several other purposes. Perhaps most important, it served to further develop the partnership between COH and the class, including me. It provided a venue for COH to give input on the research process and findings. It gave my students local knowledge so they could better understand resources available in the Ogden community, including those available at COH. It also provided an introduction to the public transportation system.

At the end of the semester, each student group submitted a final written report documenting data sources, methodology, and, of course, the estimated expenses for their budget category for all 74 family types. Each student also completed a final written reflection. In addition, the COH directors came to our campus for two full class periods in which each group gave oral presentations of their findings to COH and the class.

The final reports and oral presentations were the end products produced by the class. My original thought was to make a few simple estimates for miscellaneous expenses, entertainment, and savings myself, add those to the budget items already es-

timated, organize the separate reports into chapters, and deliver this as a final report to COH. However, midsemester, I had also applied for a grant from our campus Center for Community Engaged Learning to hire two students to help put these finishing touches on the report and integrate the separate group reports into a professional document. I received a grant and was able to hire two students from my class. They worked 10 hours per week over the summer, adding to, revising, and in some cases recalculating the original reports in order to produce a polished finished product.

## Results

Our report, *The Ogden Independent Living Standard* (Gnagey et al., 2016), was delivered to COH in August 2016. An example of the budgets produced by our standard can be found in Table 1. The full report can be accessed on the COH website (<http://www.cottagesofhope.org/the-ogden-independent-living-standard/>).

Our report shows that the incomes Ogden families must earn in order to satisfy their basic needs are significantly higher than the corresponding federal poverty guidelines for their family sizes. For example, our study indicates that a single adult living alone would need an annual income of \$21,999 to cover basic expenses, which is 185% of the 2016 federal poverty guidelines for a single individual. A family of four with two adults, one preschooler, and one school-age child would need an annual income of \$51,993, which is 214% of the 2016 federal poverty guidelines for a family of four (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). These results underscore the shortcomings of the federal poverty guidelines and highlight the need for a more meaningful measure of income adequacy.

In a recent communication, COH (Jeremy Botelho, personal communication, December 5, 2016) said they began using the Ogden Independent Living Standard for goal setting and benchmarking with all of their new clients starting in October 2016. Currently COH is working on retroactively applying it to existing clients. They plan to use it as a goal-setting and benchmarking tool for internal evaluation as well as for demonstrating progress to external parties, including funders. This application of the Ogden Independent Living Standard has allowed COH to fully implement the



**Table 1. Example Annual Family Budgets from the Ogden Independent Living Standard**

	One Adult		One Adult, One Preschooler		One Adult, One Preschooler, One Schoolager		Two Adults, One Preschooler, One Schoolager	
Monthly Costs	Costs	% of total Costs	Costs	% of total Costs	Costs	% of total Costs	Costs	% of total Costs
Housing	\$7,104	39.1%	\$9,096	30.7%	\$9,096	23.4%	\$9,096	19.5%
Childcare	\$0	0.0%	\$6,105	20.6%	\$11,549	29.7%	\$11,549	24.7%
Food	\$3,028	16.7%	\$4,425	14.9%	\$6,660	17.1%	\$8,867	19.0%
Car Insurance	\$466	2.6%	\$466	1.6%	\$466	1.2%	\$931	2.0%
Car Maintenance	\$3,290	18.1%	\$3,290	11.1%	\$3,290	8.5%	\$6,579	14.1%
Health Insurance	\$1,406	7.7%	\$2,592	8.8%	\$3,412	8.8%	\$3,412	7.3%
Out of Pocket Costs	\$108	0.6%	\$139	0.5%	\$232	0.6%	\$340	0.7%
Entertainment	\$1,139	6.3%	\$1,496	5.1%	\$1,650	4.2%	\$2,379	5.1%
Miscellaneous	\$1,614	8.9%	\$1,991	6.7%	\$2,541	6.5%	\$3,516	7.5%
Total Expenses	<u>\$18,155</u>		<u>\$29,600</u>		<u>\$38,896</u>		<u>\$46,669</u>	
Savings	\$220		\$317		\$431		\$520	
	Federal and State Credits and Total Taxes							
Taxes Before Credits	\$3,656		\$5,517		\$8,078		\$9,164	
Earned Income Tax Credit	(\$0)		(\$1,192)		(\$280)		(\$0)	
Child and Additional Child Tax Credit	(\$0)		(\$1,000)		(\$2,000)		(\$2,000)	
Child Care Tax Credit	(\$0)		(\$780)		(\$1,200)		(\$1,200)	
Utah Tax Credit	(\$471)		(\$772)		(\$804)		(\$1,159)	
Total Taxes After Credits	\$3,185		\$1,773		\$3,794		\$4,805	
	Independent Living Wage							
Hourly*	\$10.58		\$15.23		\$20.73		\$25.00**	
Monthly***	\$1,833.25		\$2,640.67		\$3,593.42		\$4,332.75	
Annual	\$21,999		\$31,688		\$43,121		\$51,993	

\* Hourly wage is annual wage divided by 2080, or 40 hours a week.

\*\* Two adult households can reduce hours worked or hourly wage by splitting work between both adults.

\*\*\* Monthly wage is annual wage divided by 12.

Note: percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Adapted from The Ogden Independent Living Standard, by J. Gnagey, D. Brinkerhoff, and M. Rodgers, 2016, Weber State University (<http://www.cottagesofhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/The-Ogden-Independent-Living-Standard-Official.pdf>), p. 11.

### SparkPoint model of service delivery.

In spring semester 2017, a group of students in an upper level computer science class developed an online application for the Ogden Independent Living Standard. Users can enter the number and ages of their family members, and the app returns the independent living standard budget specific to their family type. The app also includes several customization tools such as choosing between employer-sponsored or government marketplace health insurance and choosing between car ownership or use of public transportation. The app can be accessed at <http://cottagesofhope.org/weberstate/ontrack/form/index.html>.

This application provides a user-friendly platform for disseminating the results of our CBR project not only to COH clients, but also to the broader Ogden community. Such dissemination is important for raising awareness of poverty throughout Ogden and also for helping the local community understand the value and output of campus-community partnerships. It has proved valuable for building trust and buy-in with the local community.

### Strengths and Shortcomings

The following subsections discuss some of the strengths and shortcomings of this project. In order to structure this discussion, strengths and shortcomings are organized into five categories based on important aspects of CBR identified in the literature. The first four categories correspond to the four “critical areas” of CBR discussed in Strand et al. (2003): partnership development,

research design and process, teaching and learning, and institutionalization of CBR in the campus community. These categories tend to highlight the CBR process. The fifth category is for the results of the project. Here I align my evaluation with the framework developed in Beckman et al. (2011). They use the term “output” to describe the direct result of a project, in this case the research report. “Outcome” is used to refer to medium-term results such as changes in policy or practice at partnering organizations. Finally, “impact” is defined as an effect on community well-being that results from the accumulation of outcomes, such as greater financial stability. These different types of results can be thought of on a time continuum with outputs as the shortest term elements and impacts as the long-term goals. Ideally, individual projects’ outputs and outcomes should be designed to build toward long-term impact.

**Strengths.** This project had strengths that produced several positive results. The strengths are summarized in Table 2. Each strength is discussed below in greater detail.

In the critical area of partnership development, Strand et al. (2003) listed 10 principles for best practice. Although the partnership in this project exhibited a number of these 10 principles, I believe its greatest strength was the way the partnership was nurtured during the course of the project, particularly the class field trip to the COH offices. Although this trip was not intended to directly advance the completion of the Ogden Independent Living Standard, it went a long way toward building two well-recognized partnership features, understand-

**Table 2. Strengths of This CBR Project**

Category	Strength
Partnership development	Class field trip nurtured partnership.
Research design & process	Project addresses a community-identified need. Soliciting community partner and student input contributes to meaningful collaboration.
Teaching and learning	Soliciting student input encourages critical analysis and empowerment.
Institutionalization	Project report shared with campus-based Center for Community Engaged Learning. Project report is used by the community partner (output produced outcome).
Results	Poverty standard serves as a baseline measure for future impact evaluation.

ing and mutual respect, between my labor economics class and COH (CCPH Board of Directors, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2016; Strand et al., 2003; Torres, 2000). Additionally, due to the discussion about the meaning of basic needs that surfaced during the trip, our outing indirectly benefited the project itself.

Second, this project had several strengths in the area of research design and process. The CBR literature tends to encourage the involvement of all project stakeholders in decisions at every stage of the research process (CCPH Board of Directors, 2013; Enos & Morton, 2003; Puma et al., 2009; Strand et al., 2003; Torres, 2000). Such inclusive collaboration shows respect for the views and ideas of all stakeholders and helps produce a useful product. Although recognizing such inclusive involvement may be unrealistic, Strand et al. (2003) advised seeking stakeholder input at all stages to the extent possible but particularly in the origination of the research question and decisions about how the results will be used. Thus, our project originated from a community-identified need, and the use of the results was driven by COH. However, our project also involved both students and COH in other important decisions. Diana Pearce's work with her SSS and the MIT Living Wage Calculator were offered as examples, but both student and COH input were solicited regarding what expenses should be included in the Ogden standard. The goals for the Ogden Independent Living Standard differed slightly from those of both the SSS and the Living Wage Calculator. Thus the details of our standard were born out of periodic discussions between COH and my students and yielded several small deviations. As previously mentioned, our standard includes modest savings and entertainment budgets due to the COH mission and clientele. Seeking such input from students and COH contributes to the meaningful collaboration essential to high quality CBR.

Third, this CBR project had several strengths in the area of teaching and learning. In addition to being important for productive collaboration, the input sought from students in the development of our poverty standard aligns with a critical approach to community-engaged learning that has several specific and well-recognized pedagogical benefits (Hartley, 1999; Mitchell, 2008; Strand et al., 2003). Providing this input required students to think critically about the meaning and definition of poverty as a

social construct. Completing the project also validated different types of knowledge. As a professor, I brought technical expertise on theories of poverty measurement; COH brought community- and client-specific knowledge; and students brought the practical perspectives of their own experiences as well as their acquired knowledge of local data sources on their respective budget categories. As a result, my students decided our standard should include car acquisition costs in addition to car use, maintenance, and insurance costs. Although acquisition expenses were excluded from the SSS and MIT Living Wage Calculator budgets (Nadeau, 2017; Pearce, 2015), my students felt this was an important cost based on their own experience. Valuing this experiential knowledge deemphasizes hierarchy between professors, community members, and students. Relaxing this hierarchy is one of the key elements of critical pedagogy in service-learning because it helps empower students to become their own agents for social change (Hartley, 1999; Mitchell, 2008; Strand et al., 2003). Appreciating experiential knowledge is an important skill for both the workplace and active citizenship.

The fourth critical area discussed in Strand et al. (2003) is the institutionalization of CBR on college campuses. Although the potential for an individual project to have influence at the institutional level is limited, I did spontaneously share our final report with the staff at our Center for Community Engaged Learning on campus. Our project was subsequently featured in a university presentation to encourage high impact practices. Although Strand et al. (2003) discussed the importance of establishing campus institutions to support individual CBR projects, this anecdote suggests it is important that the individual CBR projects support and provide feedback to campus institutions as well.

Finally, our project's results were strong for several reasons. It is often stated that the most important aspect of CBR is to produce a product that is useful to the community (Beckman et al., 2011; Strand et al., 2003). We produced a report that COH has used to improve their practice. COH uses our estimated family budgets for goal setting and benchmarking with their clients. This is an improvement from the outdated and less customized budgets they had been using previously. In the language of Beckman et al. (2011), we appropriately aligned our

output (report) to produce a desired outcome (change in practice at COH). Furthermore, this project had another particular strength in its establishment of a meaningful baseline measure for local poverty. In their discussion of the long-term community impact of CBR projects, Beckman et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of establishing metrics for key community parameters (e.g., poverty rates) at the outset in order to collect baseline data and measure progress over time. They argued that this is necessary for evaluating long-run community impact, but they acknowledged that many CBR projects skip this step, often jumping right away to interventions. By starting with the establishment of a poverty measure, this CBR project laid the foundation for meaningful future quantitative impact evaluation.

**Shortcomings.** This project also had a number of shortcomings that provide room for improvement. The shortcomings are summarized in Table 3 and are discussed below.

First, with respect to the development of the partnership, although the partners agreed on the short-term goals for the report and each partner's immediate needs were met, the long-term goals for the partnership were, and still remain, vague. Best practice suggests it would be preferable to set both short- and long-term goals for the partnership at the outset (Beckman et al., 2011; CCPH Board of Directors, 2013; Strand et al., 2003). Certainly in general terms, the end goal is lower levels of poverty and greater financial stability for COH's clients, as stated in COH's mission statement. An example of a specific and measurable goal would be an increase in the percentage of clients who achieve incomes that meet or exceed our standard within a given time period. With a long-term goal in place, we

can begin to think about the set of outputs and outcomes required to achieve the goal. It will be necessary to collect baseline data on COH clients' initial incomes, as well as their basic demographic data (family composition, race, gender, education, etc.), then monitor client incomes over the course of their work with COH and its programs. Once initial 1-year, 2-year, and 3-year success rates have been calculated, we can work with COH to identify practices that help increase success rates.

Second, although student and community partner input were actively sought in the construction of the standard, COH clients were not directly involved in the project. Again, the CBR literature suggests it would be best to solicit input from COH clients (CCPH Board of Directors, 2013; Enos & Morton, 2003; Puma et al., 2009; Strand et al., 2003; Torres, 2000). Although seeking COH client input before the development of our standard certainly would have offered advantages, there are also certain advantages to waiting until a standard has been developed. The idea of a living wage standard is somewhat abstract without seeing specific budget estimates. However, our report has done just this, and now there exists a set of COH clients who have had firsthand experience with our standard by trying to reach or exceed it. These clients have had their incomes compared directly to our estimated budgets. This puts them in a unique position to provide valuable feedback about our standard. In our future work, it will be important for students to talk with COH clients to get their feedback on their experience with the Ogden Independent Living Standard.

Third, this project had several shortcomings with respect to its value as a tool for teaching and learning. Perhaps the largest

**Table 3. Shortcomings of This CBR Project**

Category	Shortcoming
Partnership development	Long-term goals for the partnership were vague.
Research design & process	Did not solicit input from COH clients.
Teaching and learning	Poor communication with students about postsemester project plans and results.
Institutionalization	Did not connect students to broader campus-community engagement infrastructure.
Results	No measured impact yet and no baseline data collected on COH clients.



drawback was that the final product, the report, was not entirely completed within the timeframe of the semester. As a result, I was not able to systematically distribute the final report to the original class of students or provide information about its use by COH. I think this was a missed opportunity for some important lessons in civic education. High quality civic education requires students to develop an understanding of how ideas turn into actions that bring about social change (Strand et al., 2003). Because most of my students stopped working on the project at the end of the semester, when the project was at an intermediate state, they never got to see the standard in its usable form, nor did they even receive confirmation of its completion. This lack of closure was compounded by the fact that the long-term goals of the project were vague. More detailed long-term goals and an opportunity to view the final report would have given students firsthand experience turning ideas into actions for social change. In the future, I plan to start a Facebook group for the project and provide some academic incentives for my students to join and post to the group. Not only will this provide a means for them to stay updated on the project after the class is completed, but some studies suggest that using social media in the classroom can increase student engagement (Junco et al., 2010; McCarthy, 2010). A more ambitious approach would be to partner with several colleagues who teach related upper level economics courses and provide students with a multisection community engagement experience. The econometrics class might help COH carry out its program evaluation. The annual Honors Seminar on Economic Inequality could offer an opportunity to use the Ogden Independent Living Standard when comparing and contrasting problems of poverty and problems of inequality.

Fourth, in terms of institutionalizing CBR on campus, my course did little to integrate my students into the existing campus-community engagement infrastructure. Most notably, the large majority of students who took my labor economics class were not aware of its community engagement component at the time of registration because they did not understand the meaning of the course's CEL designation. Although my university provides little opportunity for individual faculty members to change the content of course information displayed at registration, I plan to take several actions next time the course

is offered in order to increase awareness. I will make and post course flyers to advertise the class that briefly explain CEL designation and our community project. Flyers have been used previously in my department to successfully advertise courses. I will require my students to participate in the campus-wide Community Engagement Symposium where students create and present posters on the community-engaged projects they have worked on. I will also provide detailed information on the first day of class and in the course syllabus about CEL designation, our campus Center for Community Engaged Learning, and our university's Excellence in Community Engagement program. This program offers a special official transcript designation for students who complete a minimum of 300 hours of documented community engagement work during their bachelor's degree studies. I believe these steps would help students better understand the connection between their labor economics course and the community engagement infrastructure on our campus.

Finally, a significant shortcoming of the results of the project is a lack of measurable impact on poverty reduction thus far. Although Beckman et al. (2011) acknowledged that impact is typically a long-term phenomenon and may take several years to realize, we could have taken a few steps as part of our initial work to better position ourselves to eventually measure impact. Specifically, although we produced a report that led to a change in practice for the staff at COH, impact ultimately rests with the performance of COH's clients. However, in our initial stages, we did not collect any baseline data on these clients. Without baseline data, it is impossible to know whether the work of our partnership is having a positive, negative, or neutral impact. Given that the baseline measure of interest is perhaps the gap between COH clients' current incomes and the Ogden Independent Living Standard budgets for their family types, there is no reason such current income data could not have been collected during the time the standard was being developed. With this baseline data, the gaps between actual income and the corresponding Ogden Independent Living Standard budget could have been quickly calculated after our standard was finalized. In the future, priority will be given not only to updating our standard to reflect changing costs but also to organizing some basic data collection on COH's clients.

## Lessons Learned and Next Steps

In this section I discuss several lessons learned and describe next steps for this project. Although the lessons are derived from our specific project, the intention here is to focus on how these lessons can generalize to a broad range of CBR endeavors. Maintaining the structure of the discussions of strengths and shortcomings, I have organized the lessons learned and next steps into five categories: partnership development, research design and process, teaching and learning, institutionalization of CBR, and results. Special attention is given to lessons that can help align best practices for process and for results. The lessons learned are summarized in Table 4 and discussed in detail below.

First, in the area of partnership development, I have learned it is important to set both short- and long-term goals at the outset of the project. In order to align best practice for process and results, I recommend following Beckman et al. (2011), with short-term goals stated in terms of outputs and outcomes and long-term goals stated in terms of impact. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to outline the set of intermediate outputs and outcomes that will be necessary steps on the way to achieving the long-term impact goal. The CBR literature emphasizes the importance of flexibility on the part of both campus and community partners, and it is also important to acknowledge that an initial outline will inevitably evolve and be revised over time. However, I believe such an initial outline will help partners stay focused and increase the chances of eventually achieving measurable impact.

Additionally, from our class field trip to the COH offices, I have learned it is valuable to make time for activities that nurture

the relationship, even if these activities are not directly related to the research project. Although our field trip was not directly related to our report, it helped to build understanding and mutual respect between my students and the COH staff. Not only did this help with motivation, it also provided a venue for some informal discussion about our standard that was ultimately useful to the project. As a professor I know semesters are short and class time is precious, and I was initially somewhat skeptical about using class time for this kind of activity. However, in retrospect, I believe it was both good for the project and a good learning experience for my students. I recommend that semester-long course-based CBR projects include one activity during the semester in which progress on the research project takes a back seat to partnership development and relationship building. Partnerships need rigorous short- and long-term goals to achieve long-run impact, but both partnerships and projects are enhanced when partners remain flexible and take time to nurture their relationship.

Next steps in the area of partnership development will prioritize setting both short- and long-term goals for the continuation of the project. The primary long-term goal is to increase the percentage of COH clients who achieve incomes that meet or exceed the Ogden Independent Living Standard. In addition to updating the standard in future years, achieving this long-term goal will require the intermediate step of helping COH implement a client intake process in which baseline income and family demographic data are collected. COH already monitors client incomes during the time they are receiving COH services, so the collection of baseline data should provide the data necessary to evaluate progress toward the long-

**Table 4. Lessons Learned from This CBR Project**

Category	Lessons learned
Partnership development	Set both short-term outcome and long-term impact goals at the outset of the project.
Research design & process	Make time for occasional activities primarily focused on nurturing the partnership.
Teaching and learning	Ensure community input on defining impact goals.
Institutionalization	Talk with students about long-term project plans and give them an opportunity to stay connected.
Results	Take time at the beginning to establish both baseline measurement tools and baseline data.

term goal. We may also consider some additional long-term goals such as tracking the percentage of Ogden households that meet or exceed the standard, and/or tracking the percentage of Weber State University employees with household incomes at or above the standard. The university administration has recently expressed interest in the latter.

Second, in the area of research design and process, it is important to include community partners and students as well as members of the target population (in our case, COH clients) in the research process. The benefit of inclusivity in general is already well established in the CBR literature, but there is less consensus on the extent of inclusivity (CCPH Board of Directors, 2013; Enos & Morton, 2003; Puma et al., 2009; Strand et al., 2003; Torres, 2000). Strand et al. (2003) emphasized the importance of community participation in two research stages: developing the research question and deciding how the results will be used. In order to align process and results, I believe community involvement is also critical in identifying the long-run impact of interest. Community partners and their target populations are often best situated to describe the changes they want to see. Academic partners can then help gather, organize, and analyze information to evaluate progress toward those changes.

Next steps in the area of research design and process include soliciting input from COH clients regarding our standard. Specifically, we want to examine how the basic needs costs in our estimated budgets compare with actual basic needs expenditures of COH clients. Plans are in place to conduct a voluntary survey of COH clients to collect information on their actual expenditures within the basic needs categories. Prior to writing and conducting the survey, students will complete human subjects research training and apply for IRB approval.

Third, I have learned several lessons about how to help students connect the contributions they make in one semester to a larger ongoing community project. In addition to making sure they understand how their work during the semester will be used by the community partner, it is important to give them a bird's-eye view of the long-term goals of the project and the steps that will be carried out after the semester has finished. This can be discussed briefly in class and will improve the civic education value of the CBR project by giving students a better

understanding of how ideas are turned into actions for social change. In close conjunction, I think it is also important to provide students with a means of staying connected with the project so they have the opportunity to watch the long-term results unfold. As discussed previously, possible venues for such a connection would be a project Facebook group or a multicourse partnership to facilitate community engagement across several semesters.

Immediate next steps in the area of teaching and learning include explicitly discussing long-term goals in class and creating a project Facebook group. Long-term steps include initiating discussions with the instructors of econometrics and the annual Honors Seminar on Economic Inequality to explore the possibility of collaborating to create a multisection community engagement experience for students.

Fourth, although Strand et al. (2003) emphasized the importance of establishing campus institutions to support individual CBR projects, it is equally important that individual CBR projects support these campus institutions. At a minimum, this means sharing project outputs and other results with these institutions. I would suggest establishing some formal structure to facilitate this type of communication between individual projects and their supporting institutions. However, I would not recommend making project reporting mandatory, because this extra work for faculty members may discourage them from collaborating with the institutions on campus designed to support them. Rather, I would suggest providing some incentives for faculty to submit project reports. If funding is available, minigrants for future work on the project could encourage project reporting. In the absence of funding, a university could establish competitive awards for excellence in community engagement based on project reports submitted. If these awards were looked upon favorably by rank and tenure committees, this practice could also provide a valuable incentive for project reporting.

Next steps in the area of institutionalization of CBR include several strategies to better connect my students with the existing community engagement infrastructure on campus. First, I will require my students to attend and present in our annual campus-wide Community Engagement Symposium, where students create and present posters on community engagement projects

in which they have been involved. Second, through discussions in class and a description in my syllabus, I will encourage students to participate in our university's Excellence in Community Engagement program. This program offers a special official transcript designation for students who complete a minimum of 300 hours of documented community engagement work during their bachelor's degree studies. As mentioned briefly above, the university administration has recently shown interest in using the Ogden Independent Living Standard to evaluate the household incomes of university employees. Applying this standard would also support the institutionalization of CBR on campus.

Finally, in order to achieve long-term community impact, it is important both to establish high quality measurement tools and to collect baseline data on the target population at the outset. Too often in CBR, projects jump right to interventions without taking time to think about how to measure the impact of interest and without laying a foundation for such measurement tools (Beckman et al., 2011). Although other CBR projects may be better suited for using existing measurement tools (e.g., the federal poverty line) as opposed to developing their own, our project provides an important reminder that existing metrics cannot be taken for granted, and it is worthwhile to take time at the beginning to think about what the research project is trying to measure and ensure that such measurement is feasible. Without meaningful metrics and baseline data, eventual quantitative evaluation of impact will be impossible.

Next steps in the area of achieving long-term community impact include actually collecting initial income data from COH clients upon program entry. After helping COH

develop the client intake process to collect baseline income and other demographic data (discussed above), the intake process will need to be consistently implemented. COH already monitors client incomes during the period they receive services. When this monitoring is combined with the baseline income and demographic data, success rates (percentage of clients reaching the Ogden Independent Living Standard) over time can be measured. Additionally, processes for anonymizing and sharing data will need to be developed so that client information remains confidential. With these steps in place, rigorous long-term assessment of COH services and client outcomes can be conducted.

## Conclusion

This case study described the CBR project that developed the Ogden Independent Living Standard and reflected on its strengths and shortcomings. These reflections considered both processes and results. Finally, I discussed several lessons learned and next steps with a particular focus on linking processes to results. The lessons are broadly applicable to the field of CBR and contribute to the literature on best practice. They can help enhance both the experience and impact of a broad range of CBR projects.

The project itself is evolving and ongoing. Plans are currently in place to update the standard (as costs change over time) and to seek COH client input on the accuracy of our estimated expenditures. Additional discussions about long-term goals and measuring program impact over time are also taking place. These steps bring us closer to achieving the goal of long-term community impact.



## About the Author

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