Community Action Agencies: STRENGTHENING OHIO’S COMMUNITIES
Executive Summary
May 2012
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Ohio’s Community Action Agencies (CAAs) have been serving local communities for nearly 50 years. CAAs have long been known for their work in addressing poverty-related problems for individuals and families. Lesser known is the role CAAs play in strengthening local economies. CAAs reach beyond those in need; they are vital to increasing community capacity to create social and economic prosperity for all Ohio residents.

Community Action Agencies are private and public nonprofit organizations established under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, with the shared goal of helping all citizens become self-sufficient. There are approximately 1,000 Community Action Agencies throughout the country who strive to link public and private resources that are focused on specific issues at the community level.

Currently, there are 50 CAAs in Ohio that serve all of Ohio’s 88 counties. Every CAA in Ohio administers Community Economic Development (CED) programs and initiatives.

CAAs invest in community economic development to establish sustained, prosperous communities. They are uniquely positioned for this work because they are embedded in the community with strong local relationships and existing partnerships. CAAs contribute to CED through different roles - direct involvement, partnerships and collaborations, and leadership – in a variety of programs and services.

This report was prepared by the Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs at Ohio University. Data included in this report was collected through a mixed-method research design that included 35 interviews with Community Action Agencies in Ohio that occurred August through November 2011, and an analysis of quarterly reporting data in the 2010-2011 CAA Community Services Block Grant ROMA Workplans provided by the Ohio Department of Development Office of Community Services. Unless otherwise noted, all figures reflect 2010 data.

Researchers examined each program to determine if it met the definition of community economic development, to identify its classification of community economic development programming, and to investigate the program for exemplary status. A set of criteria was established and followed to benchmark exemplary practices. Programs selected for case studies in this report met two or more criteria. Case studies of additional exemplary programs are included in the full report.

The authors of this report wish to thank Community Action Agency administrators and program managers who participated in interviews, Ohio Department of Development and Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies.
Figure 1. Types of Community Economic Development Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Programs and Initiatives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attracts Capital Investment</strong></td>
<td>A program or initiative obtains investments from individuals, businesses, or government agencies. Capital investment must provide long-term benefits that will continue beyond the duration of the program.</td>
<td>Recycling Services, Downtown Revitalization, Commercial Development</td>
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<td><strong>Increases Business Development Opportunities</strong></td>
<td>A program or initiative assists in the development, retention, or expansion of local businesses that create or maintain jobs, attract capital, and create economic security for business owners.</td>
<td>Microenterprise, Technical Assistance, Microfinancing</td>
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<td><strong>Increases Employment or Enhances Employment Opportunities</strong></td>
<td>A project or initiative increases employment opportunities for individuals through training and education, and enhances employment through retention services and upgrading skills.</td>
<td>Job Counseling, Employer Partnerships, Industry Training</td>
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<td><strong>Results in Infrastructure Development or Redevelopment</strong></td>
<td>A program or initiative that creates, redesigns, repurposes, or improves infrastructure elements in a community to increase their benefit to a greater number of community members.</td>
<td>Broadband, Public Transportation, Housing Development</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Improves the Financial Security of Individuals through Asset-Building</strong></td>
<td>A program or initiative that is designed to help individuals obtain income-generating assets.</td>
<td>Individual Development Account, Homebuyer’s Assistance, Credit Counseling</td>
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Figure 1 above describes five key strategies of community economic development and some of the unique programs and initiatives that CAAs have developed to benefit their communities.
CAAs make a significant investment in Ohio by dedicating nearly 40% of all funding to 386 different community economic development programs and initiatives. Figure 2 shows the diversity of funding used to create and advance economic development projects by Ohio’s CAAs. In 2010, CAAs expended $208,166,627 on CED programs including $51.7 million of state funding and $17.6 million in private funding and resources.

Though Community Services Block Grant1 (CSBG) accounts for a small portion of total CED funding, several agencies have recognized it as a critical resource that allows them to take the necessary risks to spur economic development initiatives. In fact, for every dollar of CSBG allocated to CED programming, Ohio’s CAAs leveraged $10.76 of state and local dollars.

Figure 2. Funding Sources for Community Economic Development Programs (2010)

Figure 3. Private Investment in Community Action Agency Programs

CAA-administered community economic development programs are less reliant on government funding than all other community action programs. They are able to successfully leverage more resources from local investors. CAAs leveraged twice the amount of private local resources for community economic development programs than all other programs. In 2010, CED programs raised more than 9% of private resources (shown in Figure 3), whereas all other programs only leveraged 4.6% in private dollars.

1 A federal program established in 1964, which provides funding to Community Action Agencies to deliver poverty-alleviation programs.
CAAs design strategic initiatives, such as infrastructure development and redevelopment, which are key for stimulating economic growth. **Half of all total community economic development expenditures are allocated to infrastructure-related projects.** These infrastructure projects attract capital investment by revitalizing neighborhoods and attracting new residents, businesses, and community investors to acquire capital assets for the benefit of all community members.

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**GMN Tri-County Community Action Commission: BROADBAND PROGRAM**

In 2002, GMN (Guernsey, Noble and Monroe) Tri-County Community Action Commission became the first and only CAA in the country to receive a United States Department of Agriculture Federal Broadband Connectivity Grant, spurring a mission to address a critical gap in Southeastern Ohio by bringing broadband service to rural Monroe County. With that initial government investment, GMN’s broadband program has grown from initially serving the town of Woodsfield into a self-sustaining enterprise with seven towers and over 700 customers.

Though the majority of GMN’s broadband customers are residential (92%), the positive effects of GMN’s broadband service in this previously deprived region have widespread impacts on a variety of sectors and industries: twenty essential services - such as police, firefighters, and municipal offices - are now able to complete required reporting, communicate between departments, and streamline general operations. GMN provides broadband service free of charge to these essential services, reducing costs for municipalities experiencing budget cuts. The Black Walnut Center, an industrial business center, was revitalized by the new broadband access and is now home to several small businesses and provides a distance learning center for Belmont Technical College. The College’s ability to provide virtual and distance learning at the Black Walnut Center has allowed them to access a larger market and made higher education a more realistic possibility for many people in this rural area who struggle with transportation. GMN also maintains an open connectivity center that provides free internet and computer access to over 60 individuals per week.

Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) dollars were initially used to fund administrative costs and supplement two grants. To date, with 700 customers and counting, the program generates nearly $200,000 annually. The program has become self-sustaining, allowing for the employment of four staff, the purchase and upgrade of equipment, and the development of new access points to increase the broadband service area. To keep costs low, GMN continues to utilize the existing infrastructure of local communities by positioning access points on water towers, silos, and barns. Approximately ten customers are added each month, resulting in an annual revenue increase of $3,400. The program’s profits are used to maintain GMN’s firm commitment to keeping this increasingly critical service affordable for all residents.

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34% of Ohio’s population is without broadband internet access. The region of Ohio that has the lowest access to broadband is the Appalachian Ohio region.

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2  2011 Connect Ohio Residential Survey
In November 2010, the Hocking, Athens, Perry Community Action Partnership (HAPCAP) implemented a public transportation service that would challenge the perception of Ohio’s Appalachian region as inaccessible and isolated. GoBus, one of Ohio’s only public transportation options connecting rural and metropolitan areas, provides daily, round-trip service between Athens, Columbus, Marietta and Cincinnati. Initiated with funding from the Federal Transit Administration and the Ohio Department of Transportation, GoBus is part of a nationwide strategy to promote economic development in all communities by connecting rural areas and urban centers.

Many Ohio University students and Athens-area seniors recognize GoBus as an affordable transportation option to Ohio’s larger cities, but the impact of GoBus extends far beyond recreational travel. The availability of GoBus as a reliable transportation resource has increased the number of employment prospects for Ohio’s rural residents by connecting them with employers located in urban areas. GoBus also increases patronage for a wide variety of businesses, healthcare centers, tourist destinations, and educational institutions in rural and metro areas, as Ohio residents are now able to easily access goods and services throughout the state. Additionally, GoBus connects individuals with nationwide travel options, such as Port Columbus International Airport and several Greyhound stations. In the first year of operation, GoBus averaged 2,000 riders per month. HAPCAP attributes this to their firm commitment to keep tickets priced at an affordable rate of $10, a strategy that will likely continue to draw in new customers.

HAPCAP’s GoBus is the product of a strategic effort to fill a gap in Ohio’s public transportation, drawing resources from a variety of partners to provide targeted services that meet customer demands. “It’s about local partners and local needs,” states Carolyn Conley, HAPCAP’s Mobility Director. Federal stimulus funds distributed to the City of Athens were used to purchase three deluxe motor coaches and HAPCAP contracted with Lakefront, an Ohio-based company with fifty years of experience in motor transportation, to perform general operations. HAPCAP also formed a critical partnership with Greyhound, allowing GoBus to utilize their existing facilities and online ticketing system.

Through this collaborative network, GoBus hopes to continue to expand its service to additional areas in Ohio.
Over the past six years, Ohio has consistently had an unemployment rate higher than the national average. CAAs are a vital resource to get our communities back to work because they are uniquely positioned to integrate the individual, employer, and community interests that they represent. To increase and enhance employment, CAAs provide a wide range of programs and services for Ohio businesses, industries, and labor force. In 2010, CAAs spent more than $196 million on services designed to improve Ohio’s employment outlook.

CAAs not only prepare people for work, they build vital economic infrastructure to put people to work. Particularly in rural areas, CAAs are instrumental in job creation through business development and retention programs. Their work with local businesses creates new opportunities, expands product lines, and keeps business in Ohio.

CAAs keep people at work. Employee turnover is costly for businesses and CAAs provide diverse programming to promote job retention and reduce barriers to sustained employment. Among CAA programs, 34% are designed to maintain workforce productivity, such as childcare, transportation assistance, and preventative healthcare. This ultimately reduces costs for Ohio businesses and constituencies.

Community Action Commission of Pike County:
GLATFELTER PLANT CLOSURE DIVERSION

In 2007, the State of Ohio issued a Layoff Aversion grant to prevent the Glatfelter manufacturing plant, one of the largest employers in Southern Ohio, from laying off over 250 of their 1,500 employees in Adams, Brown, Pike, and Scioto counties. Pike County CAC assembled a Regional Rapid Response Team, including representatives from the Workforce Investment Board, the Governor’s Regional Economic Development Office, Ohio University, county governments, and area training specialists. The purpose of the Regional Rapid Response Team was to swiftly begin retraining and upgrading the skills of Glatfelter’s workforce.

The efforts of the Rapid Response Team not only prevented a major business in the area from closing, but also expanded Glatfelter’s services into a new forestry initiative, creating an additional 25 employment positions. These jobs provided wages and benefits ranging from $28.76-$34.34 per hour. The increase in employment and preservation of wages in the surrounding communities has resulted in a return on investment of 125.5% to the local economy.
Research shows that sector-based training has the best returns for communities. A sector-based approach allows economic developers, workforce programs, and educational institutions to come together to address the needs of a specific industry. By tailoring programs, CAAs not only build industry-ready skills but also create a highly adaptable labor pool that can adjust to Ohio’s business climate of the future.

**WSOS Community Action: MARINE MECHANICS COURSE**

Until 2002, Ohio lacked a training program to create a pool of qualified marine mechanics necessary to service the 400,000 boats registered in Ohio. Partnering with the Ottawa County Community Improvement Corporation, Penta Adult Career Center, and area marine businesses, WSOS sought to fill this local labor deficiency by creating a sector-based certified Marine Mechanics Institute that attracts students from across the country.

An industry roundtable made up of 30 marine businesses provides guidance for program and curriculum development. To date, the program has trained over 130 individuals, and 71% of graduates have become employed. The average placement wage of recent graduates is $16.74 per hour, well above the state minimum. The program continues to add an advanced level certification, enhancing program graduates’ skills. The program curriculum also provides skills applicable to industries outside the marine sector, such as auto repair and manufacturing.

Not only does this program serve existing businesses, it has also attracted new ones to the Ohio area. Volvo Penta of the Americas moved its training facility to Oak Harbor in order to capitalize on this program’s emerging labor pool. Private equipment and scholarship donations totaling over $1,000,000 is evidence this training is valuable to employers. “The Yamaha Motor Company recognizes the importance of the Marine Training Program and intends to make additional donations in the future,” states Tim Baker, Yamaha Motor Company.

WSOS also takes on a case management role by serving as a workforce intermediary to the industry.

“We handle employee retention and placement issues allowing the employers to focus on their businesses so they can continue to grow jobs,” said Kerrie Carte, WSOS Development Specialist.

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Community Action Agencies long history of public-private partnerships and strong links to local communities positions them to form collaborative efforts that can leverage funding and result in cost-effective utilization of resources. Collaborating with local entities makes comprehensive community-enhancement projects possible and is essential for sustainable economic development.

In 2010, CAAs forged **737 public-private partnerships for community economic development initiatives**. As shown in Figure 4, CAAs partner with a diverse array of key stakeholders in their local communities. Partnering with local entities enhances CAAs’ ability to identify community needs, assets, and practical strategies for impacting communities. This allows CAAs to effectively target resources to where they can have the most effect and reduce duplication of services.

These partnerships allow CAAs to leverage resources, increase program efficiency and maximize community impact. When CAAs partner with public and private entities, they increase community wealth by supporting local businesses, creating jobs, and increasing productivity. Figure 5 above demonstrates the breadth of private-sector partners that enable CAAs to capitalize on specialized knowledge, leverage funding, and reduce costs.

CAAs utilize diversified funding to achieve community-targeted goals. Of all CED funding, **11% is obtained from local, private resources** in the community including local businesses, foundations, and other diverse partners.
Ironton-Lawrence Community Action Organization: HEALTHCARE CAMPUS

In 2001, Lawrence County lost the only hospital in the county, forcing 62,000 residents to seek services from hospitals across the river in West Virginia and Kentucky. Medical professionals vacated the community, $250,000 in hospital revenue disappeared from the area, and southern Ohio had a significant gap in their health care services. To address these issues, the Ironton-Lawrence Community Action Organization (CAO) purchased an 18-acre site and is constructing a $18.5 million medical campus that will revitalize the health care industry in Lawrence County and increase access to medical services for thousands of people.

The 46,000 square foot medical facility, slated to open in July 2012, will provide the county’s only 24-hour emergency care, a diagnostic center, lab, 12-bed trauma center, and primary care services. To effectively meet the needs of the surrounding community, the Ironton-Lawrence CAO formed a critical partnership with St. Mary’s Medical Center. St. Mary’s has collaborated on designing the facility and services, marketing, and will staff the emergency room and trauma center. It is expected that the facility will create 100 healthcare and facility maintenance jobs.

Tri-County Community Action Commission of Champaign, Logan, and Shelby Counties: SENIOR NUTRITION PARTNERSHIP

After a flood in their nutrition center damaged their building beyond repair, Tri-County thought they may have to close their Senior Nutrition Program for good. However, Liberty Gathering Place, a struggling restaurant provided a prime opportunity for a public-private collaboration that would benefit both partners and the community.

Tri-County’s purchase of the facility not only allowed the business owner to retain her restaurant, maintaining the jobs of twelve restaurant staff, but also saved the Senior Nutrition Program, allowing Tri-County to retain twelve nutrition program employees. Additionally, the facility’s location and renovations have allowed Tri-County to make significant program-efficiency improvements and the restaurant now purchases local food from area farmers, further generating local revenue.
Community Action Agencies recognize that a community’s citizens are its most valuable asset, and creating self-sufficiency is the most reliable strategy for assuring prosperous communities. Programs fostered by CAAs enable families to acquire assets that increase earnings and reduce reliance on public assistance. In addition, these programs also benefit communities by generating new property, income, and local sales tax revenues.

Supports to Encourage Low-Income Families: IDA PROGRAM

In 2006, Butler County’s Supports to Encourage Low-Income Families (SELF) launched an Individual Development Account (IDA) program to bring the benefits of asset ownership to local families. SELF spent nearly three years observing best practices in the IDA field, developing a sound business plan, and utilizing input from consultants, community professionals, and staff planning committees. SELF determined that a rigorous screening process and an intensive case management system were the best approaches for helping families stay committed to their savings goals, even during times of unexpected hardship. Though the national success rate for IDA programs is generally 40%, the holistic approach undertaken by the SELF program boasted a 50% success rate in 2011.

Financial institutions, the Ohio Community Development Corporation Association, and local foundations provide match funds for the IDA accounts. These partners are critical to the program’s strategy for sustainability through diversified funding. Area banks - such as Fifth Third, First Financial, and US Bank - recognize the importance of collaborating on a program that teaches individuals how to be better consumers of financial services. Approximately 75% of participants, many who have never even had a savings account, continue to maintain a relationship with these collaborating financial institutions long after exiting the program.

The SELF IDA Program has enhanced the local wealth in Butler County by helping individuals obtain income-generating assets. Thirty-four participants in the program were able to save $34,000 of their own earnings, which were matched with $68,000 in donated funds, and have since acquired combined assets totaling $1,161,123. These assets have improved the local economy through the purchase of 16 single-family homes and the undertaking of 12 small business ventures, which currently employ 16 Butler County residents.

“SELF was a key leader among community agencies in stepping up and getting the IDA Program initiated in Butler County. It has been successful and will continue to be successful.”
–Larry Mulligan, VP, First Financial
There is no question that increasing home ownership provides multiple benefits to a community, and Fayette County’s Community Action Commission has aggressively pursued this as a key strategy for fostering development in Fayette and Ross counties. Funded by a USDA Rural Development Grant, CAC has been helping families build their own homes for the past 18 years. Families are required to complete at least 65% of the labor required to construct their home and receive a USDA 502 mortgage. Additionally, participants are required to attend weekly homeowner education courses during the home’s construction, ensuring proper, long-term maintenance of the home. Not only has this program directly impacted over 240 families in the two counties by helping them acquire a major asset, but the program has also built extensive infrastructure to support five new subdivisions in the area, directly benefiting the local economies.

It is estimated that, over a two-year grant period, 43 local jobs are created or maintained as a result of CAC’s Self-Help Housing Program. Using support from the Housing Assistance Corporation, this CAA purchases land to develop subdivisions, establishing water, sewer, and electrical infrastructure. Four to six families are grouped together and collaborate on building each other’s homes in the new neighborhood, with each group hiring ten subcontractors to perform and oversee the complex construction requirements. The USDA estimates that the local wages and salaries generated over a two year period from the development, construction, and financing of 28 homes is approximately $1,558,521.

Local businesses are also direct benefactors of the home ownership program. According to Patty Griffiths, Housing Director, initial construction for 4-6 homes generates approximately $80,000 in revenue for area businesses through the purchase of materials, and other expenses. After homes are constructed, families purchase home and garden merchandise and require maintenance services from local businesses. Additionally, individuals employed in the jobs necessary to construct and maintain these units often spend their wages in the local economy. Though difficult to measure accurately, the USDA estimates that this program provides local businesses with an income of $419,706 over a two year period. The economic impact of the program extends far beyond this two year period - residents become permanent community members maintain jobs in the area, and continue to financially support local businesses.

Additionally, each home generates approximately $6,427 in tax revenue during its first year. When including closing costs and other fees related to home ownership, the anticipated benefits to the local economy, resulting from the construction of 28 homes, are totaled at $2,285,236. The USDA projects that the long-term economic impact of these homes is valued at $25,903,668.
OHIO’S COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES CREATE LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOR LOCAL NEEDS

Each CAA in Ohio has developed unique programming tailored to the specific needs of their communities. Playing vital roles in both urban and rural environments, CAAs are adept at analyzing the local environment and deploying available resources to where they are most beneficial and identifying innovative strategies that meet local needs. Because of their long-standing community ties and a successful track record, Ohio’s CAAs were able to raise $26.2 million local dollars for community economic development projects in 2010.

Community Action Committee of Pike County: MASCO TRANSITION CENTER

In April 2010, the Masco Retail Cabinetry Group, a local manufacturer, announced it would close its plant in Waverly, Ohio and lay off 1,400 workers across a five-county area. Using State of Ohio Rapid Response funding, the Community Action Committee (CAC) of Pike County acted swiftly to create a Transition Center for this new group of dislocated workers and their spouses. By coordinating efforts with county governments, the Governor’s Office, trade representatives, area employers and social service agencies, the Pike County CAC spearheaded a concerted strategy to provide a comprehensive set of services for the affected residents of Pike, Ross, Scioto, Jackson and Adams counties.

Pike County CAC utilized a variety of strategies to ensure the Transition Center addressed the specific needs of the Masco workers. The Transition Center was positioned in a highly accessible location - at the YMCA across the street from the Masco plant. Displaced workers were surveyed to determine eligibility for the National Emergency Grant, which provided funding for skill building and On-the-Job Training Agreements. Masco employees, the majority of whom owned single-family homes, were advised on strategies and services to prevent foreclosures and evictions. Throughout the project’s development and service delivery, Pike County CAC hired several Masco employees to ensure the Transition Center effectively addressed the unique needs and concerns of this region and built trust among the Masco employees to ensure the Center was seen as a valuable resource in the communities.

Benefits of these coordinated efforts positively impacted both Masco employees and area employers. The Transition Center facilitated 34 On-the-Job Training Agreements through the Department of Labor, saving five area employers more than $400,000 in recruitment and training costs. A total of 238 Masco employees received retraining, funded by the United States Department of Labor and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), ensuring the experience, skills and dedication of these workers will benefit other industry sectors in Ohio.
Before Ohio mandated accessible recycling options, Adams Brown Counties Economic Opportunities, Inc. recognized the important environmental and economic benefits that recycling could bring to a community. In 1979, this Community Action Agency began a youth recycling program that retrieved aluminum cans on the side of the road. What started as a way to fund summer picnics has morphed into a large and robust recycling program that includes a materials recovery facility which grosses over $2 million annually.

A long-standing relationship between the CAA, Brown County Solid Waste Authority, and Adams Clermont Solid Waste District has provided residents of these counties with safe and effective disposal options for a variety of recyclable materials. Services include curbside pick-up, multiple convenient drop-off sites, and a drive-thru drop-off at the facility. In 2011, Adams Brown Recycling successfully diverted 2,413 tons of material from the landfill. The recycling program also provides stable employment for 22 individuals.

A particularly successful component of Adams Brown Recycling is its buyback program that allows residents to sell non-ferrous metals at recycling center sites in Georgetown and West Union. In 2011, this program purchased recyclable materials from 34,735 customers, resulting in $1,426,151 in the hands of local residents. “That money circulates close, going for necessities, it’s staying mostly in our counties,” states Dan Wickerham, of the Adams Brown Recycling Center.

This direct impact enabled families to spend money in the local economy and kept 997 tons of waste out of the landfill. In addition, the recycling center bundles the hard-to-recycle purchased material and sells the commodity on the market. Last year, the buyback program made a profit of over $350,000, which was reinvested into other recycling operations such as public education and outreach.

With experts estimating that recycling can create up to ten times as many jobs as landfills and incineration, trash should be viewed as a representation of potential jobs, financial opportunities and resources, not as something disposable.

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