



A Minnesota Without Poverty Holds Statewide Event on Status of the State's Poverty Reduction Goal

Introduction and background

A Minnesota Without Poverty, or AMWOP, a Half in Ten partner, has been leading the charge to end poverty in the state for years.

The organization sponsored an event in 2006 entitled “Focus on Poverty,” which featured a diverse panel offering ideas on how to end poverty in Minnesota by 2020. John Hottinger, a state senator in attendance, wrote a bill creating a legislative commission to end poverty in Minnesota by 2020 after listening to the panel discussion and reviewing “A Common Foundation: Shared Principles for Work on Overcoming Poverty,” the document that launched much of AMWOP’s work. Hottinger’s bill passed with bipartisan support and established a bipartisan legislative commission that developed recommendations to eliminate poverty by 2020 over the next two years.

AMWOP sponsored the public launching of the Legislative Commission to End Poverty’s recommendations in January 2009. More than 300 people attended the event and signed a “commitment to end poverty” document. They represented government, faith communities, the business sector, education, people experiencing poverty, youth, foundations, nonprofits, and communities of color.

In February 2010, AMWOP sponsored the second annual gathering to report on progress toward ending poverty in Minnesota by 2020. The organization used the gathering to build community and issue a call to action.

This template will describe the planning, program, and resources for this second annual statewide gathering, which was called, “If Not We, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?” We hope the template will prove useful to interested groups planning similar events.

Event details

AMWOP held “If Not We, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?” on Saturday, February 27, 2010, at five sites in different parts of the state. These included St. Paul, Duluth, Moorhead, Willmar, and Rochester as well as some home-based small group gatherings.

A 30-minute portion of the evening’s programming was web linked to engage activists statewide. Keynote speaker Don Samuels, an activist, pastor, and city councilmember, remarked on the state’s progress in its commitment to end poverty during this part of the program. The web-linked portion concluded with an opportunity to join in an immediate call to action. The call to action’s focus was on the first recommendation in the Legislative Commission’s report, “restore work as a means out of poverty.”

Musicians and poets provided special entertainment, and letter-writing, conversation, and food were part of each gathering. Participants were also invited but not required to bring a gift card—such as a gas card, transit card, or Target gift card—to support workers and those seeking work.

More than 400 people attended the statewide gathering on five sites along with an unknown number who joined online for the web-linked portion of the program. Several state legislators, religious leaders from various faith traditions, city mayors, and gubernatorial candidates were present as well.

The gathering was co-sponsored by 14 statewide organizations and each site had two to seven local sponsors.

Participants at all the sites wrote letters supporting the Ladder Out of Poverty bill, which subsequently passed. All sites also collected signatures of people committed to ending poverty by 2020, which were then added to the roster for sending out action alerts and news from AMWOP.

Here are follow-up words from the Rochester site organizer (southeast Minnesota):

I must say that the 75 or so people who stayed 7:30-8:30 were engaged in serious discussion. There was no nonsense, just very serious work.

And here is a portion of the report back to the organizers in St. Paul from the Moorhead site (northwest Minnesota):

What worked well for us was our local speakers. Bishop Wohlrobe (ELCA) and Bishop Hoepfner (Catholic) gave very moving messages, as did Gregory Gray, Jon Evert (chair Association of Minnesota Counties), and Representative Lanning. We had a very good discussion time as well.

Event planning and replication tools

Timeline

Months of planning and outreach helped make this event a success. The planning began in June 2009—nine months prior to the event date.

First, AMWOP identified a planning team. The Arts Workgroup became the primary planners, while members of the Statewide Organizing Team representing each of the local sites provided further leadership. AMWOP chose Luther Seminary in St. Paul as the central event location because of the seminary’s technological capability and willingness to host the event. Each of the other four sites was chosen for the same reasons.

Halfway through the planning process a project coordinator volunteered her expertise and time to develop the timeline and track progress. The comprehensive timeline for each site and aspect of the event can be found [here](#).

Reaching out to speakers and press

AMWOP invited a city councilman to participate in the web-linked part of the program who represented a part of Minneapolis that has experienced concentrated poverty. All sites invited additional speakers such as mayors, legislators, and bishops, as well as singers and poets to perform.

The organization secured a 30-second radio spot that aired on AM 950 twice a day to gin up outreach to the larger community, and they did an interview with Minnesota Public Radio.

It did other promotions primarily online to the email roster, and through faith communities, Facebook, their web site, and especially the networks of the various co-sponsors. They also sent letters to legislators, county commissioners, and other leaders.

Cultivating local partners

AMWOP invited a number of local and statewide groups to co-sponsor this event.

Most of these organizations had already collaborated with AMWOP in a variety of ways. But several ethnic-specific economic development centers were invited to co-sponsor as well along with organizations representing low-income workers. All of them were committed to ending poverty in Minnesota and represented the diversity of the state and its residents.

Co-sponsoring organizations agreed to:

- Publicize the event in their networks.
- Promote the recommendations of the Legislative Commission to End Poverty.
- Commit to nonpartisanship.
- Provide financial support for the event if possible.

Co-sponsoring organizations were also permitted to have a display table at the event.

The co-sponsoring organizations are listed below in the text box:

Co-sponsors: Affirmative Options Coalition; Catholic Charities—Office for Social Justice; Jewish Community Relations Council; Joint Religious Legislative Coalition; JOBS NOW Coalition; Latino Economic Development Center; Legal Services Advocacy Project; Lutheran Coalition for Public Policy in Minnesota; Minnesota Catholic Conference; Minnesota Community Action Partnership; Minnesota Council of Churches; Native American Community Development Institute; Neighborhood Development Center; Rebuild Resources

Local co-sponsors for each site: St. Paul—Luther Seminary, Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church; Duluth—Peace United Church of Christ, CHUM; Moorhead—Lakes and Prairies Community Action Partnership, Concordia College; Willmar—The LINK, Heartland Community Action; Rochester—Interfaith Hospitality Network, St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Bethel Lutheran Church

Several of the co-sponsors contributed funds to sponsor the event and most of the sites charged no rent. Several other small grants helped with the funding as well as some individual and in-kind donations. Excluding local site costs other than St. Paul and in-kind costs the event cost approximately \$6,800.

Next steps

AMWOP is now planning for the next statewide gathering on December 9, 2010. This event will report on the benchmarks toward ending poverty, the implementation of the Legislative Commission to End Poverty recommendations, and a call to action. It will also prominently feature Half in Ten's policy priorities and pledge.

Hosting this event in December is convenient because it will take place after a new governor is elected and before the 2011 legislative session kicks off. AMWOP has invited all gubernatorial candidates to commit to attend the gathering and hopes to secure the winner as a keynote speaker. Two of the three final candidates have accepted the invitation.

The event's theme will be "Enough for All." AMWOP is inviting artists to depict "enough" at the event in music, poetry, story, video, food, fabric, and visual arts. It launched the search for art on September 1, 2010. Various sites will exhibit the artists' work at gatherings throughout the state. AMWOP also plans to provide web links to the various sites for part of the program, including the keynote address and the call to action. The remainder of the program will be locally planned and implemented.

Advocacy organizations and coalitions interested in replicating the planning process for this event can consult the appendix to this event template.

1. Format for St. Paul site (with web-linked program)

6:00 Registration and rice bar open

World Canvas Art Project Charles Hoffman
Displays Commons area
Music Luther Seminary drum circle

6:30 Doors to chapel open

“Early in the Morning” Kat Weisberg and Dane Ohri

6:45 “Chat room” opens; local sites and others log on

Welcome Kathy Tomlin
“If Home is Where the Heart Is” Tottiana Adams
“Do the Math” Lauren Martinez Catlin
“If Not We, Then Who? (If Not Now, Then When?)” Rodney Dixon

7:00 Web-linked program

Welcome and introduction of five sites Nancy Maeker
Video: “If Not We, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?”
Keynote address City Councilman Don Samuels
Report and call to action Brian Rusche and Deborah Schlick
Song: “Strangest Dream” Julia Dinsmore
Hand off to local sites Nancy Maeker

7:30 Invitation to the unlikely Heatherlyn

Move into action Mark Rogosheske

7:45 Call to action/conversation/food Cafeteria

Online chat room continues Laptops in commons area
Music Javier Trejo
World Canvas Art Project Charles Hoffman
Displays Commons area
Three-minute “soap box” Chapel—Zachary Binfield

8:30-9:00 Informal checking in with people as they leave; collecting any ideas and letters

Template appendix

1. St. Paul event format
2. News release
3. Invitation letter
4. Flyer

2. News release

According to 2008 census information 491,000 Minnesotans were living in poverty—140,000 were children. All of these are real people—precious children, youth, adults, and families—created and loved.

It's been a year since the public launching of the Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020 report. This launching event, titled "If Not We, then Who? If Not Now, Then When?" was hosted by A Minnesota Without Poverty.

Now, one year later, how are we doing?

A Minnesota Without Poverty will sponsor a second "If Not We, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?" gathering on Saturday, February 27, 2010, to report on progress toward ending poverty in Minnesota. This time the gathering will be held at five sites throughout the state: St. Paul (Luther Seminary), Duluth (Peace United Church of Christ), Moorhead (Concordia College), Willmar (Ridgewater College), and Rochester (Bethel Lutheran Church).

All sites will be web linked for a 30-minute program. Keynote speaker Don Samuels, an activist, pastor, and city councilmember, will present where we are in our commitment to end poverty during this part of the program. Participants will have the opportunity to join in an immediate call to action that evening, and carry out this call in the following months. The call will focus on the first recommendation from the Legislative Commission's report: Restore work as a means out of poverty.

Home and small group gatherings also will have access to the 30-minute web-linked program [here](#). (The "chat room" will be available from 6:45 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.)

Each site will have music, food, art, conversation, and celebration as well as an invitation into this audacious commitment to end poverty in Minnesota by 2020. These events are community gatherings designed to bring people from all across our state and from all economic realities and walks of life together to end poverty. Participants are invited but not required to bring a gift card—such as a gas card, transit card, or Target gift card—to support workers and those seeking work. Child care will be available as well.

We know the challenges and sober news but there are signs of hope. It is our audacious calling and we can answer that call—for the sake of all Minnesotans.

So, now, if not we, then who will end poverty?

Co-sponsors for the statewide gathering

- Affirmative Options Coalition
- Catholic Charities—Office for Social Justice
- Jewish Community Relations Council
- Joint Religious Legislative Coalition
- JOBS NOW Coalition
- Latino Economic Development Center
- Legal Services Advocacy Project
- Lutheran Coalition for Public Policy in Minnesota
- Minnesota Catholic Conference
- Minnesota Community Action Partnership
- Minnesota Council of Churches
- Native American Community Development Institute
- Neighborhood Development Center
- Rebuild Resources

3. Invitation letter

January 28, 2010

Re: Invitation to A Minnesota Without Poverty Statewide Gathering



Dear Minnesota State Legislator:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of A Minnesota Without Poverty, or AMWOP, it is with great excitement that I invite you to the second annual **AMWOP statewide gathering, “If Not We, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?”** on **Saturday, February 27, 2010.**

As you know, the Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020 released its final recommendations for ending poverty more than one year ago. AMWOP gladly hosted the public launching of the commission’s report at a gathering last January. Since then we’ve learned that 491,000 Minnesotans were living in poverty during 2008 and 140,000 of our neighbors living in poverty were children. We have a lot of work to do and your dedication to the well-being of all Minnesotans is integral to our work.

Minnesotans will gather in Duluth, Moorhead, Rochester, St. Paul, and Willmar to: celebrate our commitment to creating a Minnesota where every person thrives; stand in solidarity with our neighbors throughout our state; and evaluate our progress toward and recommit ourselves to ending poverty in Minnesota.

All five AMWOP statewide gathering sites will offer celebration, inspiration, conversation, food, music, and a call to action. This year’s call to action will emphasize the commission’s first recommendation—to restore work as a means out of poverty. We know that we face many challenges in our work but we also know that together we can do great things.

Attached please find an event flyer detailing AMWOP’s statewide gathering. I encourage you to share this invitation with your legislative staff and everyone else committed to ending poverty in Minnesota. We look forward to seeing you in Duluth, Moorhead, Rochester, St. Paul, or Willmar on February 27, 2010. If you have any questions please contact Nancy Maeker at (612) 310-9560 or nancymaeker@mnwithoutpoverty.org. Together we can make our state a state without poverty!

Very Truly Yours,

Nancy Maeker, Director Kathy Tomlin, Board Chair

Board Members of A Minnesota Without Poverty: Kathy Tomlin, Mark Rogosheske (co-chairs)

David Everett, Alexandra Fitzsimmons, Mark Peters, Brian Rusche, Teshite Wako

A Minnesota Without Poverty is a statewide movement to end poverty in Minnesota by 2020. • www.mnwithoutpoverty.org

4. Flyer



If not we, then who? If not now, then when?

Join the statewide movement to end poverty by 2020

Saturday, February 27, 2010 • 6:00pm to 9:00pm

(Web-linked program 7:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.) Join in [here](#).

FIVE WEB-LINKED SITES:

St. Paul—Olson Campus Center, Luther Seminary
Duluth—Peace United Church of Christ
Rochester—Bethel Lutheran Church
Moorhead—Knutson Campus Center, Centrum, Concordia College
Willmar—Ridgewater College

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: DON SAMUELS

Activist, business leader, pastor, and city councilmember

Sites will also feature food, conversation, art, music, and displays

A Minnesota Without Poverty believes that together we can create inventive solutions to reverse the cycle of poverty and put an end to it for good. It's not an easy task but we believe the promise of ending poverty can become a reality by building bridges with business, education, faith communities, government, communities of color, voices of poverty, foundations, and other nonprofits.

DONATIONS INVITED:

Gift cards from Target, and gas and transit cards to assist workers and people seeking employment.

PLEASE RSVP TO:

nancymaeker@mnwithoutpoverty.org
or on the Minnesota Without Poverty
Facebook group page

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