

Bridges to Progress – How We Got Here

BOCV members formed a steering committee and sub-committees working on goals to embed these constructs throughout the area. They provided community trainings in the Bridges concepts and formed goals to reduce barriers and grow resources for citizens. The sub-committee groups were: Business, Community, Courts/Law Enforcement, Education, Faith Based Community, Government, and Housing.

A strategic planning meeting was held every 90 days with the community. The subcommittees had concrete goals called 90 day plans. Subcommittees would meet in the time period between the 90 day meetings to work on their plan. At each 90 day meeting, all the subcommittees would report out on their 90 day plan's progress and create their next 90 day plan. The subcommittees and meetings were open to anyone interested in the initiative.

Lynchburg's City Council soon saw a need for more direct support from government to spur community involvement and after commissioning a study to analyze this pressing issue, Council approved additional funding for further work on poverty reduction in 2016.

Beginning with a call to action from former Mayor, Joan Foster at the State of the City address in March of 2017, citizens were asked to be an integral part of the poverty reduction strategy in Lynchburg. A kick-off event for the newly minted "From Poverty to Progress" initiative was held in May of 2017 to engage the public, enhance support for ongoing programs, and flesh out definitive community concerns. Citizens of all ages, creeds, ethnicities, and incomes (many of whom may have not been at the same table otherwise) were now a part of a long-term collective effort to reduce poverty in the City of Lynchburg. This event began the process of developing action items focused on eliminating barriers for our low-income citizens. It was also a catalyst for the civic engagement of faith-based organizations, non-profits, individuals, businesses, schools, and others to rally around the cause of community uplift.

In 2018, Lynchburg continued to strive toward the mark of poverty reduction and increased median household income through civic engagement. A Community Gathering held in June of 2018 marked a year of progress toward accomplishment of goals set by the workgroups. These projects included, but are not limited to: Early education tutoring assistance, building a grocery store in an identified food desert, creating an alliance to increase affordable childcare options, improving kindergarten readiness, developing easier access to health resources, implementing a community-subsidized transportation application, and revamping local public transportation. Each of these items require an immense level of engagement, collaboration and cooperation.