

# The Buffalo Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative

## Executive Summary

April 27, 2017

The Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI) was created as the result of grant monies set aside in the 2016/17 New York State budget for sixteen (16) impoverished communities throughout the State. Each community received a designated sum of money based on available census data and federal poverty guidelines for their respective population living in poverty. It is worth noting that there is reliable data to suggest these federal guidelines are out of date and the actual number of families and individuals living in financial hardship is significantly greater than census numbers indicate.

The Mayors of the 16 respective cities were given the responsibility to identify a non-profit convening organization that would manage the ESPRI grant in concert with key stakeholders and each community is permitted to develop their own unique planning & implementation strategy subject to the criteria outlined in the grant. As part of the process Mayors of urban communities are required to establish a Poverty Task Force to consist of public officials, community and faith leaders, the business sector, those living in financial hardship and non-profit organizations. The purpose of the Task Force is to use available community data and input through community forums to determine the highest priority needs in specific communities.

Buffalo received an allocation of \$2,750,000 and the ESPRI is set up in two (2) Phases: Phase 1 is designated as the Planning stage with an anticipated end date of November, 2017 and Phase 2 is the Implementation stage which is scheduled to end in March, 2019. For Buffalo, a sum of \$300,000 is allowed for Phase 1 with the balance available for Phase 2 after the submission and approval of an Implementation Plan by the NYS Office of Temporary Disability (OTDA). The intent is to develop best practice systems change models that can be replicated across the county that have the greatest potential to positively affect those populations living in financial hardship.

Mayor Byron Brown issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) to solicit interest from community organizations to function as the lead Convener organization for the management and oversight of the of ESPRI. The United Way of Buffalo & Erie County (UWBEC) was selected as the lead Convener organization, along with the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (CFGB) as the Co-Convener organization. As part of start-up activities in support of ESPRI, a Project Director has been hired and a Steering Committee and Task Force has been assembled to commence Phase I planning activities.

Enclosed for your information and review is a copy of the Steering Committee and Task Force Charters as well as a copy of the ESPRI Work Plan submitted by the UWBEC to the NYS OTDA.

### The ESPRI Steering Committee and the Community Task Force

The ESPRI Steering Committee is comprised of elected public officials, including Mayor Byron Brown, Senator Tim Kennedy, Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes, County Executive Mark Poloncarz, as well as Michael Weiner, UWBEC (Convener) and Clotilde Dedecker, CFGB (Co-Convener). The Steering

Committee has been meeting on a bi-weekly basis since January to provide support and project management that adheres to guidelines for Phase 1 activities.

The Task force is represented by community leaders, consumers, not for profit organizations, persons living in financial hardship and representatives of various educational, health and business sectors within the community.

The purpose of the Task Force is to provide strategic advice to the Steering Committee on issues of poverty and financial hardship that impacts individuals within the community. Its role is to advise the Steering Committee on priorities and best practice solutions that assist in the development of a plan for how best to utilize Phase 2 funding. The Phase 2 strategic plan is intended to target poverty reduction system intervention strategies beginning in the City of Buffalo and eventually reaching high risk communities across Erie County.

The Task Force currently is comprised of 28 persons invited to serve and work towards the goals outlined in the ESPRI grant and outlined in the mission statement. The Task Force will meet monthly and will be asked to help identify key issues that combat financial hardship and participate in work groups on an as needed basis.

Integral to the mission of the Task Force is its role in providing expertise and insight during the planning process to realize the ultimate objective of developing an implementation plan that will promote systems change and reduce financial hardship starting in the City of Buffalo. The ensuing collaborative work of the Task Force will involve the use of available data and analytics on poverty and financial hardship and citizen feedback from the community forums.

In addition, the Buffalo ESPRI Task Force goals include:

- Development of a common agenda among stakeholders;
- Presentation of community and individual level data to identify needs, foster understanding and build consensus as the ground work for designing a shared system of measuring, collecting and reporting data consistently at both a community and participant level;
- Coordination of mutually reinforcing activities through the development of a plan of action that aligns the leadership and practice of all participants along with shared goals; and
- Facilitation of open and continuous communications.

### Reporting and Compliance

ESPRI is required to submit monthly reports to the NYS OTDA in addition to quarterly reporting on employment and vendor measures associated with Minority and Women Business Enterprises. The OTDA contract specialist assigned to the Buffalo ESPRI is Liz Morrissey, who will be jointly involved with the work of the Task Force. In addition, New York State has assigned a liaison to our ESPRI, to assist and advocate on our behalf. The liaison for Buffalo is Elizabeth De Leon Bhargava, the New York State Deputy Commissioner of Labor.

Attached for your benefit is a copy of ESPRI Phase 1 and 2 Report Guidelines issued by OTDA.

## Conclusion

The Buffalo ESPRI provides our community a unique opportunity for leadership in the public, non-profit and private sectors to come together and build consensus on a shared vision to improve the quality of life for persons living in financial hardship now and for future generations. It is a unique opportunity in the history of the community to set the agenda for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century economically viable and prosperous city in which all its residents share in the benefits.

## Enclosures:

Steering Committee and Task Force Charters  
ESPRI Work Plan  
Phase 1 & 2 Report Guidelines  
Buffalo ESPRI Task Force Member List