



North Dakota Economic Security and Prosperity Alliance

**North Dakota Economic Security & Prosperity Alliance (NDESPA) Meeting
Wednesday, April 16, 2014**

Draft Meeting Summary

Proposed Meeting Goals:

- To reconvene in a spirit of collegiality and cooperation;
- To complete the revised strategic plan for NDESPA; and
- To receive partner updates and news of interest.

NDESPA Partners: Janelle Moos, Linda Isakson and Bridget Malone (ND CAWS), Karen Ehrens (Healthy ND and Creating a Hunger Free ND), Rhonda Styles-Rhode (Charles Hall Youth Services), Doreen Riedman (AARP ND), Renee Stromme (ND Women's Network), Erin Hill-Oban (Tobacco Free ND), Kim Jacobson (ND County Social Services Directors Association), Josh Boschee (State Representative), and Megan Evjen, NDSU/MSU student Social Work Intern.

NDESPA Guests: Deb Knuth (American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network) and Kristie Wolff (American Lung Association in ND)

Facilitated by: The Consensus Council

Welcome, Introductions & Process Review: Partners were welcomed to the meeting and reminded of the discussion ground rules and the consensus-based decision-making process. Brief self-introductions were given and it was agreed that the group would first hear from the meeting guests and then move on to the other agenda items.

Raise it For Health ND Campaign: Deb, Kristi and Erin shared information about a coalition effort to raise tobacco taxes by \$1.56/pack (present tax is .44/pack, one of the lowest in the country with a national average of \$1.53/pack). They provided NDESPA partners with data relative to the number of ND smokers, other efforts at deterring smokers (successful and not), potential income generated by the increased tax as well as the obvious health benefits. NDESPA was expressly asked to join the coalition. There was lively discussion regarding this issue among NDESPA partners, particularly related to the regressivity of the tax and its impact on low and moderate-income people (already paying a greater percentage in taxes than higher income earners). Partners ultimately agreed that it is not a priority issue for NDESPA and that we would not actively "sign on" to the coalition. However, some individual partners or organizational partners might be in a better position to do so. There was also agreement that NDESPA would not take an opposing stance on the campaign. For those interested, the next meeting of the Raise it For Health ND Coalition is scheduled for May 5, 2014 at 2:00 p.m. in Bismarck. For more information, contact Deb Knuth (701.250.1022 or deb.knuth@cancer.org).

(Follow-Up Note: additional materials from the campaign coalition have been provided since the meeting and will be emailed to partners along with the NDESPA News)

Poverty & Public Policy Discussion: Rep. Josh Boschee (D-44), Fargo, and NDSU/MSU Student Intern Megan Evjen were warmly welcomed to the meeting. Megan provided copies of her research paper "*Moving Children Out of Poverty in North Dakota*" and highlighted her six public policy recommendations including:

1. Establish state funding to Head Start and Early Head Start
2. Establish a ND Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) at 10% (of federal) Refundable credit
3. Allow state family medical leave and create parental leave laws
4. Give children subsidies on EBT during summer months
5. Increase the ND minimum wage
6. Additional recommendations as made by the National Center for Children in Poverty (<http://www.nccp.org>)

There was discussion about the recommendations and several NDESPA partners agreed to provide additional information (data, ideas, best practices) to enhance the work already done by Megan. It is hoped that this paper will be the first in a series of three – another should be written relative to policies impacting moving American Indians out of poverty and a third written specific to the needs of the elderly. There was additional discussion relative to the lack of focus on the part of government leaders to children, the elderly and American Indians (all considered vulnerable populations) especially as it relates to health, employment opportunity, early education and housing. In fact, data indicates that over 20,000 children under the age of 5 in North Dakota are living in "extreme" poverty. It was agreed that the work of NDESPA helps to fill a critical need for public policy advocacy on behalf of low and moderate-income North Dakotans and that Megan's work will be another tool in the NDESPA toolkit. Megan was thanked for her hard work, researching and writing, and was encouraged to keep in touch with NDESPA partners (especially post-graduation when she'll be looking for a Social Work job!). Representative Boschee was also thanked for utilizing a student intern to assist in this important work.

NDESPA Strategic Planning: Partners reviewed the current iteration of the NDESPA Strategic Plan that would guide our shared work through 2017. Several suggestions for improvement were made. Consensus Council staff will add these changes, complete estimates of timelines and related resources needed and post the plan on the NDESPA website (<http://ndespa.org>) in May.

Partner Updates/Other News/Activities of Interest: NDESPA Partners shared updates and news of interest as follows:

- AARP ND continues to educate North Dakotans about the "10 Steps to Retirement" and how to prevent becoming the victim of a scam. In May and June 2014, AARP ND will focus public meetings on the issue of brain health.
- NDCAWS reports a successful Race to Zero event with over 160 people participating. Additionally, they are receiving many contacts related to human trafficking – folks looking for resources, direct services, safety and shelter. Janelle is working with a group

of agencies in Washington DC (Dept. of Justice, Health & Human Services, among others) that will work to address the extreme crime problems in the Bakken (drugs, human trafficking and increased violence). NDCAWS has hired a new Community Organizer for western ND and a new Public Relations & Communications Coordinator in the Bismarck Office. There have also been three new advocacy positions developed in the communities of Bowman, Watford City and Kenmare/Mohall, allowing for more direct outreach and service in oil-impacted counties. NDCAWS is a part of the Rural Behavioral Health Network (as are other NDESPA partners) working to address the significant lack of available mental health services in western ND, particularly inpatient services.

- The County Social Service Directors Association continues to work on increasing state appropriations for administrative services as additional programs come to their purview. There has been discussion (by those outside of the Association) about creating eight “super counties” for administrative purposes. There continues to be a need to improve technology systems (in silo programs) to a point where they are better synchronized (and can “talk to” each other), resulting in less time spent manually inputting data. Kim noted that the ND Association of Counties is presently conducting an internal study relative to some of these issues.
- Creating a Hunger Free ND has acquired two new members – the ND Farmers Union and the Midwest Dairy Council – CONGRATS! The Hunger Free Garden initiative is getting underway soon and there is a need for additional state funding to administer/support these efforts. The Great Plains Food Bank has indicated that they could accommodate more fresh produce and that their patrons welcome it.
- The ND Women’s Network is seeking nominations for Woman of the Year. The NDWN is tracking the work of the Interim Judiciary Committee and has recently completed a successful Ready 2 Run event in Fargo – many ‘graduates’ of this training can now be found as candidates for public office in 2014! The biennial Women’s Lobby Day/WE RISE is scheduled for March 9, 2015.
- Charles Hall Youth Services is celebrating 50 years of service (CONGRATS!) and are working toward raising \$50,000 in the fall of 2014 to match a grant. Interestingly, based on need/demand, all of the group homes will now house only girls.
- The Consensus Council is preparing for the 14th annual International Legislators Forum (June 25-27 in Moorhead, MN) and will be discussing topics including agriculture, energy, water issues, trade, economic and workforce development. The Consensus Council has closed the first quarterly round for submitting Community Innovation Grant proposals (<http://agree.org/communityinnovationgrants/>). The next round will open on July 7, 2014 and will close on August 4, 2014. Also keeping the Consensus Council busy is the provision of final grant reports to the Otto Bremer Foundation (submitted in January 2014) and the Northwest Area Foundation (due April 30, 2014) for their support of NDESPA work. Additionally, a new proposal has been submitted for continued funding from the Otto Bremer Foundation (submitted April 9, 2014) and we will request a conversation with the leadership of Northwest Area Foundation to solicit an invitation to apply for their continued support. As of March 31, 2014, NDESPA has essentially no funding to continue. However, we are confident in our ability to successfully gain funding in the near future.

- The NDESPA sponsored Affordable Care Act Enrollment Event in late March was a success, having enrolled about 25 people (diverse health and economic circumstances, ages, employment, etc.). We were fortunate to have partnered with the ND Center for Persons with Disabilities and their skilled Navigator Team – and we were thankful to provide a warm and welcoming environment for the event at the First Presbyterian Church in Bismarck (thanks to the advocacy of Karen Ehrens). It was a very rewarding experience and time well spent!

Next Meeting: The next meeting of NDESPA is scheduled for Tuesday, June 17 from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Consensus Council office or by conference call. More details to follow as that date draws closer

NDESPA partners were thanked for their hard work, commitment, participation and candor – the meeting was adjourned by consensus of the group.

***NDESPA Mission:** The North Dakota Economic Security & Prosperity Alliance works to build and sustain a system of economic security for all through poverty awareness and education, grassroots and community capacity building, research and data development, and promotion of policies and practices to eliminate disparities and obstacles for achieving economic security.*

Working Draft