



2021-2026

Western South Dakota Community Action Strategic Plan

Commissioned by the
Western South Dakota Community Action Agency
Conducted by
Benchmark Data Labs

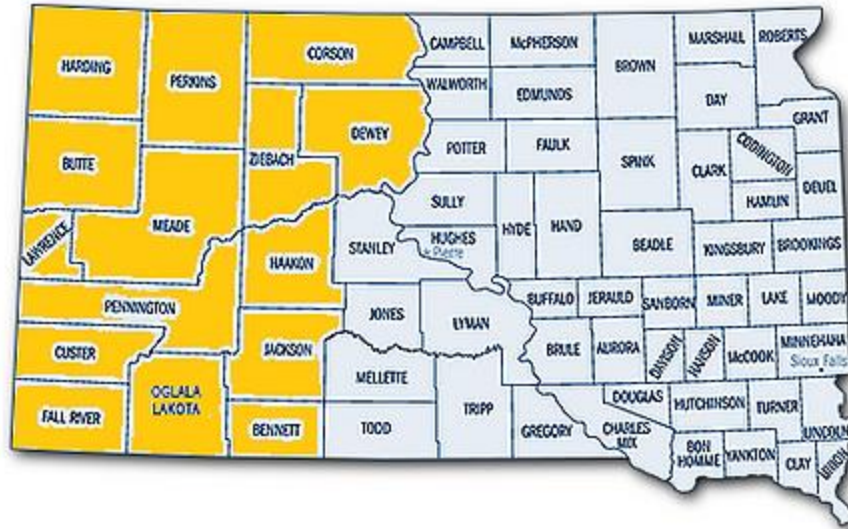
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Introduction

About Western South Dakota Community Action

Western South Dakota Community Action (WSDCA) Incorporated in 1965 as 501(c)(3) non-profit organization for the purpose of conducting the Federal Office of Economic Opportunity's War on Poverty. As of 2021, WSDCA serves the following 14 counties and their residents: Bennett, Butte, Corson, Custer, Dewey, Fall River, Haakon, Harding, Jackson, Lawrence, Meade, Pennington, Perkins, Ziebach.



WSDCA employs 22 individuals who partner with over 600 organizations to serve a geographic area of 29,741 square miles. WSDCA administered 20 programs annually including:

Basic Needs

- **COMMODITIES AND SENIOR FOODS** Commodities are offered on a monthly basis to eligible low-income families. The Agency also provides food boxes to those 60 years and older that are income eligible.
- **PERSONAL CARE ITEMS** When supplies are available, personal care items can be received on a monthly basis by low-income families.
- **GARDEN KITS** Garden kits are available once a year to families who are registered with our commodities program and are income eligible.
- **SCHOOL SUPPLIES** School supplies are available for children aged 5 through 18 who are low-income and signed up for our program.
- **YOUTH RECREATION** Swim passes are provided to children aged 5 through 18, who are income eligible, allowing them to swim in public pools all summer free of charge.
- **COVID CARES ACT** This program provided community members with additional resources to maintain stability during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Basic Needs-VISTA Programming

- **COMMUNITY GARDENS** Community Garden Vista Program will add two new gardens a year to under-served communities in our service area and increase their knowledge on healthy food options.
- **COMMUNITY KITCHEN** The Community Kitchen Vista project will utilize our kitchen to teach culinary arts and provide a small business incubator to those in need of equipment associated with starting a business.

- **PERSONAL SUPPORT GROUP** The Prisoner Support Group will work with our current support group to provide resources to those currently incarcerated and work with those prisoners currently working in our agency as trustees for after release support.

Health

- **HEALTH CARE COVERAGE ASSISTANCE (ACA)** Staff help those who need assistance obtain health care coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace.
- **MEDICAL EQUIPMENT ASSISTANCE** Medical equipment (ie. bathtub seats, shower and tub rails, etc.) is available for those in need. To participate in the program, one must have a doctor's prescription for the equipment.

Housing

- **LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)** LIHEAP is for low-income households who can't afford to pay their home heating bills. The program offers small grants that only cover a portion of heating bills.
- **AIR CONDITIONER LENDING (SUMMER)** Air conditioners are available for lending during the summer to families who are income eligible and can provide a doctor's statement.
- **DAKOTA DREAM SAVINGS FUND - INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT (IDA)** First-time home buyers can use this income-based program which matches earned income savings 3 to 1 up to \$2,000 (or up to a combined total of \$8,000). After a minimum savings period of 6 months, the funds can be applied toward the down payment and closing costs of a new home.
- **WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM** The Weatherization Assistance Program is designed to help low-income households overcome high energy costs by making their homes more energy efficient.

Employment

- **EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE** Within 30 days of your start date, the agency can provide assistance with tools, uniforms, books, and specialized training to obtain employment. We also help obtain birth certificates and driver's licenses. This service can be utilized once per calendar year.
- **VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE (VITA)** The VITA program offers free tax help to people who generally make \$54,000 or less, persons with disabilities, and limited English-speaking taxpayers who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns.
- **TAX COUNSELING FOR THE ELDERLY (TCE)** In addition to VITA, the TCE program offers free tax help for all taxpayers, particularly those who are 60 years of age and older, specializing in questions about pensions and retirement-related issues unique to seniors

Results Oriented Management and Accountability

Federal Mandates require Community Action Agencies to submit a strategic plan that incorporate a Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) design. WSDCA contracted with Benchmark Data Labs (BDL) to facilitate this process. BDL adhered to ROMA standards in designing and implementing the strategic planning process and deliverables.

Benchmark Data Labs worked first with Executive Director David Barnes to define the process parameters and establish a strategic planning executive committee comprised of both staff and board members. BDL then implemented a staff survey to collect data about program efficacy and clientele. BDL also worked with staff to collect internal programming data and documentation. Data collected through staff surveys and documentation then informed two meetings of the strategic planning board committee. During these meetings, the executive committee reviewed the mission and vision of the organization, updated the previous 5-year SWOT analysis, and outlined 4 strategic goals and corresponding objectives.

In August 2021, both staff and the full board of directors were invited to a strategic planning session. Board members were briefed on results of the staff survey, data collection, and executive committee work. Attendees then worked in small groups to assign strategies to the 5-year objectives set out by the executive committee.

BDL then worked with staff to develop performance indicators, action plans, and evaluation protocols.



Mission and Vision

WSDCA staff and board members revised their mission and vision to the following:

Mission

Help low-income and vulnerable populations achieve stability in their communities

Vision

WSDCA provides services that reduce poverty in Western South Dakota one person at a time

Internal Assessment Key Findings

WSDCA has notable difficulty maintaining a full board of directors. Of the 42 available board seats, over a third (16) remain unfilled as of August 2021. The majority (8) of these are civic positions, followed by low-income positions (6) and two government positions. Both staff and board members iterated that board membership bylaws and lack of outreach may be contributing factors

WSDCA has an experienced and long-lasting staff. As of August 2021, WSDCA had 20 employees, 17 of whom complete the staff survey. 41% have worked at WSDCA longer than 10 years. Many long-term employees are in leadership or oversight positions and work on multiple programs. These staff contribute a variety of perspectives and skills to WSDCA and its clientele. Over half of all staff work with four or

more programs. Of those new to WSDCA, many were hired to administer Covid-19 CARES Act programming.

Programs identified as most important/appreciated by staff help individuals meet immediate basic needs for food and long-term necessities like a safe and affordable place to live and health care coverage. Staff found it difficult to select the five most important programs administered by WSDCA, many sharing insights that a web of services are needed to help clients achieve stability. Key staff insights include:

- *"I would select all of them if I could. Having known the agency... as client and a day labor employee for many years I know firsthand how much these programs mean to the people and how much they help the people"*
- *"Nobody should go hungry, everyone should have a right to a warm, safe home, everyone should have access to health care and good personal hygiene"*
- *"most of our clients are on a fixed income and these programs save them some money... this in turn puts money into the general economy "*

When asked for a moment of impact, staff most frequently shared stories about housing and health programs. Also discussed were the impact of meeting basic needs. Key insights include:

- *"A low-income elderly man was called by a health insurance agency and was convinced to purchase one of their plans. I helped him go back to his original plan and get his low-income assistance back. He was so grateful for my help it brought tears to my eyes."*
- *"I once worked on an elderly woman's house. she had lived in the house for many years and had very high heating bills. We repaired her heating system and insulated her house. When we were finished she told us she had never felt warm in her house before. She was 94 and can now live the rest of her life comfortably and for a reasonable monthly rate."*
- *"A client told me how grateful she was for getting help from our food programs because her chemotherapy and medications were so expensive that she could barely make it. "*

Staff Identified the following priorities for the next five years:

- **Increased staff**
 - *"We have a shortage of staff which takes its toll after a while. Not all the time, but you can tell when someone has reached the end of their rubber band."*
- **Increased programming**
 - *"Be expanded with more programs to the community."*
 - *"More manpower to deliver more services on the reservations in our area"*
- **Higher staff wages**
 - *"I would like to see the employees get paid what they should be making."*
 - Covid-19 funds provided a momentary surge in employee wages, but once funding ran out, hourly wages returned to their previous levels
- **Onsite facility improvement**
 - *"Clean up/remodeling of main bathrooms and repair of floors in the hallway by the bathrooms, more privacy for areas that require clients to give and receive personal information, better signage/labeling of outside doors."*

SWOT Analysis

Review and discussion of staff survey and internal data allowed the executive committee workgroup to update the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis from the previous 5-year plan. The SWOT analysis below served as a foundational planning tool in creating the strategic plan's goals and objectives.

| <i>Internal</i> | | <i>External</i> | |
|---|--|--|---|
| Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats |
| What do we do well? | What inside of our organization could negatively impact us? | Are there new directions to explore? | What outside of our organization could negatively impact us? |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nimble, organized, kind, enthusiastic workforce 2. Skilled labor available through Dept. of Corrections, provide strong environment for inmates to thrive 3. Strong core volunteers 4. Clean Audits 5. Building/Office Space Paid for 6. Committed Board of Directors 7. Strong partnership network including community groups, faith-based groups, and the state 8. Convenient and needed programming 9. Always thinking of new ways to help the community 10. Long history of serving the region 11. Pay out annual leave for staff 12. Regular staff and dept meetings, positive workplace culture | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Limited, burnt-out staff 2. Limited public awareness of mission and programs 3. Lack of IT staff in house 4. Lack of fundraising capacity 5. Diversity of Funding sources 6. Need for parking lot surveillance 7. Need to improve ongoing input from low-income people/support groups 8. Lack of awareness of program activities by board/local community 9. Community awareness of programming 10. Maintaining a fully seated board 11. Security of personal information shared within facility and potential for identity theft | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff/inmates get training in specialized areas/skills 2. Link to transitional prison unit 3. There will always be a need for services 4. Be in the conversation within community about needs- be at the table with other groups 5. Flexibility to serve the underserved 6. Be umbrella for other resources and groups 7. Incubator for services and programs needed in communities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pandemics/natural disaster 2. Unstable funding 3. Lack of interest/community buy-in 4. Tightened or changing government guidelines 5. Competition with other agencies 6. Inability to find/retain qualified staff 7. Crime 8. Mental health barriers/client frustration 9. Poor weather for travel 10. Large, rural service area 11. Inmate behavior 12. Lack of transportation in region |

2021-2026 Strategic Goals and Objectives

WSDCA staff, service, and board data and discussion informed the following 5-year strategic goals and objectives:

| 1. Engage vulnerable populations in WSDCA decision-making | |
|---|--|
| Objectives | 1.1 Collect and prioritize feedback from participating vulnerable populations in program development |
| | 1.2 Expand low-income participation in program oversight (the board) |
| 2. Increase public understanding of WSDCA programs and their context | |
| Objectives | 2.1 Increase awareness of who and how an individual can qualify for programming |
| | 2.2 Share success of programming impact with larger community |
| | 2.3 Increase civic leader support for programs and people served |
| | 2.4 Communicate historical legacy of WSDCA and role it plays as program implementor and incubator |
| 3. Expand flexible program funding for WSDCA needs | |
| Objectives | 3.1 Increase pool of unrestricted funds to meet needs of the agency outside of grant line items |
| 4. Strengthen internal WSDCA communication and feedback loops | |
| Objectives | 4.1 Foster continual communication between staff and board members |
| | 4.2 Maintain accountability for staff and board roles set forth in the strategic plan |

These goals and objectives align with six anti-poverty ROMA goals set forth in federal standards:

1. Low-income people become more self-sufficient
2. The conditions in which low-income people live are improved
3. Low-income people own a stake in their community
4. Low-income people, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems
5. Partnerships among supporters and providers of service to low-income people are achieved
6. Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results

Key Strategies

WSDCA staff and board members outlined numerous strategies and action steps needed to meet the goals and objectives set forth in this strategic plan.

| 1. Engage vulnerable populations in WSDCA decision-making | |
|--|--|
| Objectives | Strategies |
| 1.1 Collect and prioritize feedback from participating vulnerable populations in program development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a data collection system to captures needs and eligibility of clients during their initial call for service. • Develop and launch a feedback process for clients upon delivery of services. This may include digital comment forms, surveys, and physical comment boxes on site. |
| 1.2 Expand low-income participation in program oversight (the board) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise bylaws to make low-income appointments to board easier which may include nomination by a board member or staff rather than public elections. • Regularly invite low-income individuals to board meetings and other WSDCA events. |
| 2. Increase public understanding of WSDCA programs and their context | |
| 2.1 Increase awareness of who and how an individual can qualify for programming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote services regularly through social media, radio, newsletters, media appearances. • Expand service promotion to Instagram and twitter to reach younger audiences. • Regularly update and replace brochures distributed at community hubs including: convenience stores, libraries, senior centers, DSS offices, YFS offices, and other nonprofits. • Task board members to develop distribution plans and locations specific to each county. • Re-organize website so similar programs are grouped together and flow is improved. Expand program descriptions and include eligibility or requirements for each. • Have program director film short videos to accompany program descriptions and explain requirements, eligibility, and required documentation if applicable. Review and update these videos yearly. • Provide access to website to staff and ask program directors to update their respective sections monthly • Develop and hire a public awareness/outreach position tasked with overseeing all of the above. |
| 2.2 Share success of programming impact with larger community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish agency success stories in local papers to promote services and impact. • Host mixers with community leaders. • Provide tours of facility with leaders and other small groups. • Include testimonials on outreach materials including social media, pamphlets, brochures, and the website. |
| 2.3 Increase civic leader support for programs and people served | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify individual people to work and organize local community events aimed to involve local leaders. • Recognize that “leaders” is a term that encompasses not only formalized leadership positions (like city council members or |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>county commissioners) but other informal leaders in the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize annual community meeting/open house open to all and includes food. |
| 2.4 Communicate historical legacy of WSDCA and role it plays as program implementor and incubator | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update video history of the organization and submit to media outlets Review past history and update to current status annually both at board meetings and through public outreach channels. |
| 3. Expand flexible program funding for WSDCA needs | |
| 3.1 Increase pool of unrestricted funds to meet needs of the agency outside of grant line items | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement 2019 Fundraising Strategy Document as approved by the board. Use funds for board approved purposes that address needs expressed in the strategic plan including but not limited to staff pay, facility improvements, client management systems, and expanded outreach efforts. |
| 4. Strengthen internal WSDCA communication and feedback loops | |
| 4.1 Foster continual communication between staff and board members | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite staff to board meetings more frequently. Provide regularly designated times for staff members to share their duties and stories of impact at board meetings Arrange for all board members to visit story and talk with staff before board meetings. Encourage additional communication between staff and board members through email updates, newsletters, or other means. |
| 4.2 Maintain accountability for staff and board roles set forth in the strategic plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review strategic plan during board meetings quarterly. Repeat out on goals and outcomes achieved quarterly. Include question on staff performance review that asks how staff contributed to implementing the above strategies. |

Acknowledgements

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- Joe Castle
- Sally Zacher
- Deb Looby

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- Jeanette Hoff

About Benchmark Data Labs

Benchmark Data Labs is a non-profit consulting company that specializes in economic analysis, program evaluation, and data outreach. We believe that smart and impactful decision-making is built on a foundation of reliable data and sound methodology. Benchmark Data Labs uses its expertise and products to inform and educate its clients and the public so that they can make data-driven decisions that will support their future success.

Our consulting revenues directly support our dedication to making impactful data accessible to our region through the South Dakota Dashboard. We invest time and resources to design and update our dashboards so that everyone has access to this data free of charge. We also conduct pro-bono outreach in the form of trainings, presentations, and data inquiries.

