

**Group D: Developing Sustainable and Just Communities**



**Policy Issue Brief:**

“Developing Sustainable and Just Communities” by Katherine Irwin & James Spencer

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**Summary of Work Sessions:**

**Session I. Preferred Futures and Public Policy Strategies**

This session focused on how individuals, communities and institutions that work with disenfranchised groups think about public policy and its impact on residents of poor communities. In particular, the discussion uncovered the feeling of a deep disconnect between policy makers and the issues of concern for those working in the fields of community development, unemployment and criminal justice. The everyday realities of poor education, lack of viable job opportunities and incarceration, according to participants, seemed far from the bureaucracies

empowered to set regulation and allocate resources to develop community-based economic opportunities and the practices for re-integrating those in the criminal justice system back into communities. Because of this gap between policy and the lived experience of communities, the group suggested that greater attention needed to be paid to how policy makers learn about critical issues as well as how public policy is made relevant to community residents and others generally unfamiliar with how public policy is formulated, debated and implemented.

## **Session II. Public Policies and Recommendations/ Next Steps**

The session opened up the issue of how better to connect disenfranchised communities to the decision-making process inherent in public policy. The conversation ranged from advocacy of particular policies to a wholesale restructuring of the way that public policy is formulated. In particular, some participants advocated an expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to support the working poor and increase savings among disadvantaged communities, while others called for a shift of policy investment from incarceration to education. However, the greatest consensus was achieved within the group on the need to develop and improve the general dialogue between disenfranchised groups and the policy formulation and implementation process. Participants generally agreed that improving this link was essential for developing just and sustainable policies. However, they also agreed that reducing the policy-community gap would take a long-term, concerted effort and require significant organizing, educational and research skills. The group ended the session agreeing that – though this key challenge was daunting - a set of institutions and individuals would need to step into that role if future public policies in Hawai'i were to serve all of its residents.

## **D. Developing Sustainable and Just Communities**

### **Katherine Irwin and James Spencer**

#### **Background**

##### Policy Area and Goals

The goals of the “Sustainable and Just Communities” group is to bring together policy makers, practitioners, stakeholders, and researchers working in two different policy arenas including economic sustainability and criminal justice. The challenge presented to this group is to take these two policy arenas that, to date, have been considered separate and unrelated and to look at them as connected and mutually reinforcing. In practical terms, this means that we will look at such community level problems as joblessness, the lack of affordable housing, the economic inequality of native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Southeast Asians in the state as related to the increased rates of incarceration in Hawai`i, the rise of drug use (especially “ice”) throughout many communities, and the recent political pressure to build new prisons in Hawai`i.

##### Economically Sustainable Communities

On the topic of economic sustainability, the goal of this policy group is to look at the term “sustainability” in new ways. In the past, sustainability initiatives have often evoked images of environmental conservation, land use planning, and alternative forms of transportation. Interestingly, in many areas of the country, policies designed to preserve the natural environment have negatively affected the poorest and most marginalized communities. As a result, policy makers around the country have had to build bridges between preserving the environment and providing widespread economic opportunities. In Portland, OR, for example, stakeholders learned that any regional sustainability agenda could not survive without the support of affordable housing advocates. Similarly, environmental policy makers in Atlanta learned that they could not craft effective initiatives without contributing to greater opportunities within low-income African American communities

##### Just Communities

Practitioners and policy makers throughout the country have also discovered the links between economic sustainability and crime and criminal justice initiatives. In the past several years in Hawai`i, crystal methamphetamine or “ice” use has quickly evolved into one of the most widespread social problems confronting the state. Not surprisingly, this drug tends to be rampant in the most marginalized and poorest communities. Although Hawai`i remains committed to avoiding an over-reliance on incarceration, the fact is that increased ice use, among other factors, has left this state with quickly growing corrections budget. The rising rate of incarceration has had a devastating impact on local communities. For example, incarceration spending often comes at the expense of education and job training programs that could provide viable opportunities for local youth. Without economic opportunities, adequate drug prevention, or drug treatment, youth and adults in economically disadvantaged communities have few non-drug related options. While Hawai`i

remains committed to providing treatment rather than incarceration for first time drug offenders (see SB 1188, 2002), the state straddles a delicate balance among the pressure to build new prisons, respond to community-level crime problems, and provide adequate community-based programs.

## **Issues**

This policy group will exchange viewpoints, research, and experiences on community-level issues centered on the criminal justice system and economic opportunity, explore links between policy areas, and begin to formulate a policy agenda. The hope is that, by bringing individuals together from different policy areas, we can develop and implement a policy agenda that addresses the fundamental causes of a range of problems facing Hawai'i – in this case the causes of economic disenfranchisement, crime, and drug use. Towards this end, if there is sufficient interest and commitment among participants, the group may form the core of a long-term collaboration of individuals dedicated to addressing these concerns. An organization like the College's Public Policy Center could facilitate and logistically support this ongoing effort.

This policy group will bring together a collection of scholars and practitioners committed to improving the opportunities within poor and disenfranchised communities in Hawai'i, especially opportunities for youth. Each group member will have expertise in a particular area, but also be interested in discovering how others approach community-based problems. The premise of bringing such a diverse set of activists together is to explore how advocates of divergent policy agendas can learn from one another and build constituencies that facilitate and reinforce their existing work.

## D. Sustainable and Just Communities

### **Session I. Preferred Futures and Public Policy Strategies:**

- Based on Economic and Social Equality, a Hawaii where any individual can realize their dreams
  - Public Administration that is coordinated and comprehensive and based on trust and results.
  - Development policies that value human potential vs. monetary advantage.
  - Systemic support of community-based economic development.
- Where justice is promoted by the intrinsic values held and shared by the community.
  - Reaffirmation of value of a diverse society
  - Recognition of substance abuse as Public Health issue
  - Stopping demonization of offenders and creating programs to help people succeed
  - Recognizing that prohibition has caused more
  - How do we achieve participating accountable citizenship?
- What is your preferred future?
  - Institutional structures that provide opportunities for employment, housing, health care
    - Critical but constructive evaluations of policy and other efforts
  - A public debate that values hearing and incorporating the aspirations of historically excluded groups/individuals.
    - What is needed?
      - Information on how state and federal legislation jobs, the distribution of economic development
      - Good information on how poverty, housing, economic legislation/policy affects people.
- Each of us to be responsible and care for ourselves, family, community, state. There are limited resources both state funds and economy--how to share preserves limit use
  - Education and Laws reduce NEED--limited resources
  - Facilitate community input
    - Virtual town meetings

- Internet pulling
- A vibrant, diverse, wise, peaceful, open-minded, caring, unique, strong culture of people
  - Leadership development all levels
  - Reexamination of property laws and policy
  - Family friendly and economic policy
  - Revamped education system
    - Curriculum
    - Control
    - Leadership
    - Purpose
- An engaged community that pursues a high quality of life
  - Need more deliberative forums that involve the community in formulating ways to attain a quality of life based on a shared values and visions.
  - Have leaders attend to these community.
  - Base values and directions and not on the values and directions of narrow or self-interest groups.
- Equal distribution of resources:
  - In balance with nature
    - Rights with responsibilities--those who make final decisions or who shape decisions have to live, breathe in their outcome.
      - Out o their comfort zone
  - Transformation of HATE industries to PEACE industries
    - Find the "enemy" and switch roles. Take what WE know and turn it over-- look at underside.
  - Understanding between all cultures
- An island community that:
  - respects and supports family values and unity
  - preserves natural resources
  - embraces cultural diversity
  - strengthen local institutions such as schools and libraries to increase participation

- preserves open spaces--natural resources
- support social ventures
- encourage living within our "means"
- invests in human capital and community capacity
- develops or supports opportunities for staying or returning to Hawaii
- heal the headless society
- reconnect leaders to community

## **Session II. Public Policies and Recommendations/Next Steps:**

- WHAT ARE THE 2 OR 3 PRIORITY PUBLIC POLICY AREAS FOR THIS GROUP?
  - Shift money from incarceration to reformed education
  - Enhance/encourage community engagement and civic literacy
  - How to involve people in decision making affecting their communities \
  - Comment: Today's process is in the same mold as the process that created the condition we're in. We need a "process transformation" that creates a safe place or structure to sustain dialogue and deliberation.
- WHAT NEXT STEPS ARE PROPOSED?
  - Don't let this stop.
- WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT TO ADDRESS THOSE PRIORITY POLICIES?
  - Process transformation: Some kind of deliberative forums to understand why policy process is not working and how we can change it
  - Civic engagement: Begin with both leadership conducting town hall meetings and having deliberative forums on important civic issues.
  - Reform education: Have a set of forums to discuss the essence of education and why we haven't attended to this essence
  - Build capacity in communities through community development and asset enhancement projects
  - Open doors for communities to become part of political and policy process
  - Make very real resource choices to shift money from incarceration to community empowerment
  - Use schools as community centers and provide adequate resources for total community participation
  - Create an acceptable model for policy development in Hawaii...The current system is broken, ineffective, ill informed, and incongruent with our fundamental values.
  - Rethink how policies are determined in very basic way
  - What are competing demands for resources
  - Change current structure



- Enhance community engagement
- Shift money from incarceration to education
- Begin an engagement strategy to define what public policy is
- Collect and generate information on those decisions we see as important to feed into the discussion
- Create a "safe"- "supportive" place for the discussion of change o take place
- WHO ELSE SHOUD BE INVOLVED?
  - Government/community/business/education leadership
  - Community leaders
  - Teachers in schools
  - Lawmakers
  - Public at large
  - Those directly impacted by decisions
  - This has been very theoretical and not practicable--legislators should be involved
  - Community groups and activists working to change the process and reach out to different and disenfranchised sectors
  - Direct community involvement, "pulse-taking"
  - Not government, but they should be aware of it
  - Include those impacted by policy in the conversation-
  - Unofficial community leaders (social groups) and not just elected or those who can afford it!
- HOW CAN THE PUBLIC POLICY CENTER HELP?
  - Start the process of bringing their issues to light and get leadership involved and conduct deliberative forum and conduct the necessary research/analysis.
  - Provide forum infrastructure and administrative labor to make this happen
  - Evaluate the role special interest power groups have in shaping policy, public opinion (media), etc.
  - Work out a specific issue
  - By encouraging a productive dialogue to identify problems, promoting positive restructuring of system for wider involvement, and advocating for policies to address REAL community needs and goals

- Provide the overhead capacity for this
- Create a new process--recognize that the current process is not sustainable enough to discuss sustainability