

## **Helping Communities Make the Grade: The Community Vitality Report Card Project**

How does a community know how well it is doing on poverty alleviation? How can data on poverty be the most useful? How can they make a difference in local communities? The Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, in association with the West Coast Poverty Center, is working to create an annual *Community Vitality Report Card* to help counties and cities build the capacity to reduce poverty and create sustainable economic opportunities.

Funded by the Northwest Area Foundation (NWF), this five-year, \$1.5 million project will create, disseminate, and evaluate a tool that presents indicators in a visually compelling format and reflects the interrelationships among demographic, economic, social, cultural, and environmental conditions. Through the Report Card, the project hopes to help NWF change the conversation on poverty with local elected officials and other policy leaders within its territory, which includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa.

### **Harnessing Data for Local Poverty Reduction Strategies**

Some state and local officials do acknowledge poverty reduction as a top priority, but the degree to which they use objective information to gauge their progress is unclear. The Report Card will fill this need by conveying quantitative and qualitative “pictures of poverty” in elected officials’ communities, driving home the point that poverty eradication is an essential component of community vitality. Specifically, the Community Vitality Report Card Project will:

- Inform policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and the media on how well individual counties located in the eight states are achieving community vitality and economic security for all.
- Highlight trends, shortcomings, and successes in poverty alleviation at the county level with linkages among regions, within the nation, and across the globe.
- Support the dissemination of stories on poverty that contextualize the struggle of individuals in the face of systemic problems in need of policy solutions;
- Provide accurate data to better inform problem definition, policy actions and measurable results.

### **Changing the Public Conversation on Poverty**

The annual Report Card will build on existing indicators on NWF’s [Indicators Website](http://www.indicators.nwaf.org/) [http://www.indicators.nwaf.org/] to enhance evidence-based decision-making among policymakers, state and local elected officials, policy analysts, and community leaders searching for durable solutions to poverty. The strategic presentation of the Report Card to policymakers and to the media will provide local officials a widely-publicized yardstick to measure their effectiveness, helping the NWF meet its goal of prioritizing policy initiatives for poverty reduction.

### **Project Leadership**

Evans School Associate Professor [Rachel Garshick Kleit](#) serves as the Project Director and Principal Investigator. Kleit is a leading expert on community development, particularly concerning affordable and mixed-income housing.

Additional project leadership provided by:

- Evans School Dean and Professor [Sandra Archibald](#) (economic sustainability and environmental indicators)

- Evans School Professor [Andrew Gordon](#) (communications and information technology, evaluation)
- Post Doctoral Fellow Tanja Srebotnjak (environmental indicators and statistics)

Project advisors include:

- Evans School Assistant Professor [Joaquin Herranz](#) (community vitality indicators, workforce development, evaluation)
- Evans School Assistant Professor [Laura Evans](#) (tribal and intergovernmental policy coordination)
- Evans School Professor [Robert Plotnick](#) (anti-poverty and welfare policy)
- Human Services Policy Center Director [Rick Brandon](#).