



# MEASURE UP: A CALL TO ACTION

## Principles for Measuring Rural and Native Nation Development Progress

- 1 Expand the range of individual and community assets used to indicate critical rural development progress.
- 2 Do not dictate what to measure. Work with rural initiatives to define the progress indicators that make local — and mutual — sense.
- 3 Measure progress relative to the rural effort's starting point at its current stage of development — not against an ideal "success" standard.
- 4 Measure decreases in place, race, and class divides — and increases in the participation and decision-making that reduce these divides — as inherent elements of increasing rural prosperity.
- 5 Identify, value, and measure effective collaboration as progress toward rural prosperity.
- 6 Identify, value, and measure signals of local momentum as progress toward rural prosperity.



**MEASUREMENT PRINCIPLE 3:**

Measure progress relative to the rural effort's starting point at its current stage of development – not against an ideal "success" standard.

## Action Story 3: Centering the Start... to Finish



*A member of Aroostook County Action Program's Housing Team presents a decorative sign to a customer to welcome her into her new mobile home. The unit replaced a pre-1970's era mobile home that was no longer safe or energy efficient to live in, and was funded through a Maine Housing Program administered in Aroostook County by ACAP.*



*Children in ACAP's Early Care and Education Program plant vegetable seeds as part of a special nutrition program supported through both the SNAP-ED and 5-2-1-0 Let's Go Programs, also administered by the Community Action Agency.*

### Committing to priorities set by the people or places that a program aspires to help can be a critical step for project integrity and defining true success.

Committing to priorities set by the people or places that a program aspires to help can be a critical step for project integrity and defining true success. Adopting the *Crisis to Thriving Framework* for holistic family development was a four-and-a-half-year journey for Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP) in Maine – a journey that brought dramatic transformation not only for striving local families but for the organizations that embraced the framework.

The [\*ACAP Crisis to Thriving Framework\*](#) includes 19 different domains that are critical ingredients in moving whole families into stable and then thriving conditions (e.g., food security, housing situation, school readiness, financial management, transportation, childcare). Families select their priorities, indicate their current circumstances, and then, with supportive coaching, move through milestones from *crisis*, to *vulnerable*, and then onward to *safe*, then *stable*, and, finally, *thriving* status. By choosing what's important to them – that is, choosing their own starting point and what they want to work on first – families are motivated to invest in the work that they know will measurably improve their lives.

Jason Parent, executive director and CEO of ACAP, said of adopting the framework, "We were definitely swimming upstream because you're not necessarily doing it with the initial blessings of funding sources. You're having to prove that this is an opportunity." The hard work of organizing family engagement and measurement around the framework in the early years paid off during the pandemic. Parent described the impact: "I cannot imagine how our agency would have served our community if this pandemic had happened before we began this transformation, and before we began to look at how we work collectively across the organization and tap into all resources and truly put our customers at the center of the work that we do. I've seen the difference that it's made in the lives of the families that we serve, but I also see the difference it's made in the staff doing the work. Our staff should be wiped out, exhausted from the additional efforts that we're doing with the pandemic right now, but they're feeling that they're making that difference in that measurable success in families' lives." Starting with a strong targeted framework that places the intended beneficiaries at the center of defining what progress looks like benefits everyone.