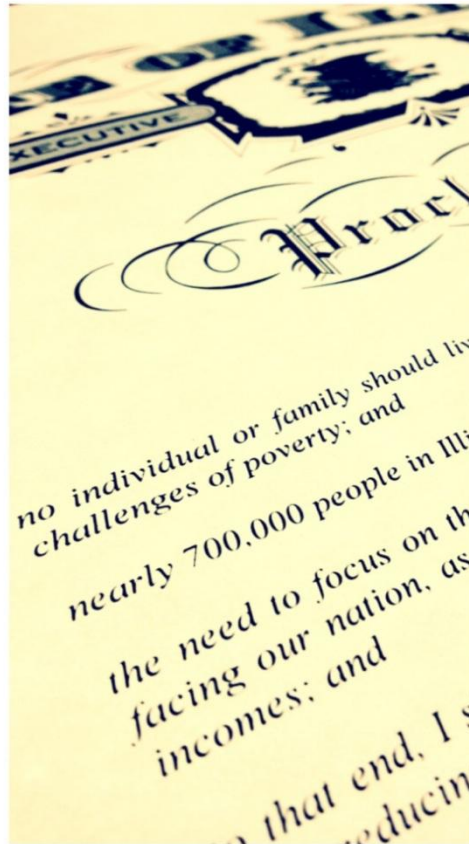


UTILIZING THE HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK



June 2013

Lessons Learned from the *From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign: Realizing Human Rights in Illinois*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign is generously supported by The Libra Foundation and the Woods Fund of Chicago.

A special thank-you to The Libra Foundation for providing funding for this report.

Primary Author: Kimberly Drew

Editorial Assistance Provided by: Amy Rynell, Allyson Stewart, Amy Terpstra and Sam Tuttle.

Cover Photo Credits: Amy Rynell and Allyson Stewart

Page 12 Photo Credit: Erin Klee – www.erinklee.com

Suggested Citation: Drew, K. (2013, June). Utilizing the Human Rights Framework – Lessons Learned from the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign: Realizing Human Rights in Illinois. Chicago: Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights.

Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights

Heartland Alliance—the leading anti-poverty organization in the Midwest— believes that all of us deserve the opportunity to improve our lives. Each year, we help ensure this opportunity for nearly one million people around the world who are homeless, living in poverty, or seeking safety.

Our policy efforts strengthen communities; our comprehensive services empower those we serve to rebuild and transform their lives. Because of this 125-year commitment, Heartland Alliance has evolved into an organization that is uniquely:

Far-reaching: Each year, in Chicago, the Midwest, and around the world, our services help nearly one million struggling people secure the most basic of human needs — housing and health care, jobs and justice.

Holistic: Because the causes of poverty, injustice, and lack of opportunity are interrelated and interlocking, our programs are similarly comprehensive and integrated, allowing us to achieve an unusual synergy in meeting our clients' needs.

Change-driven: In addition to direct service, we partner with lawmakers and organizations to shape public policies that fit the needs of everyone, ensuring that even the most vulnerable can realize a brighter future.

Heartland Alliance was founded in 1888 at a time when Chicago was the fastest growing city in the world. Newcomers to the city, particularly vulnerable women and youth, were able to receive help with housing, employment, and community resettlement.

Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights was formally adopted as the name of our organization in 1995 to best reflect our growing portfolio of housing, health care, economic security, and legal protections services. The experience, values, lessons, and programs of more than a century are connected in Heartland Alliance.

More than 125 years later we are now the largest service-based human rights organization in the United States. Our experience and reach allows us to provide opportunities that change lives. In response to human rights violations around the world and the effects of violent conflict, disease, and growing inequality, we have expanded our reach to more than 20 countries. Heartland leverages its decades of experience and its proven methodologies to serve marginalized and vulnerable people and advance human rights at home and around the world.

To learn more about Heartland Alliance's efforts to advance human rights in Illinois through policy and systems change, visit www.heartlandalliance.org/policy-and-advocacy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
FROM POVERTY TO OPPORTUNITY CAMPAIGN: REALIZING HUMAN RIGHTS IN ILLINOIS	7
Overview	7
Why address extreme poverty utilizing a human rights framework?	8
Defining extreme poverty	10
Key components of the campaign	10
LESSONS LEARNED	23
A human rights approach effectively moves the poverty conversation away from charity and toward dignity and justice	23
A strong organizational foundation supports quick campaign start-up and stability	23
The human rights framework promotes coming together with one voice	23
Being intentional about messaging and language helps new audiences hear and understand human rights more effectively	24
Policymakers require a different approach from other audiences when it comes to human rights	26
It is important, though challenging, to create a drumbeat to sustain attention and support over time	27
Create multiple avenues for engagement of leaders experiencing poverty	28
Having a state sanctioned body, the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty, can be an effective tool to support change, but it takes considerable nurturing	30
REFLECTIONS FROM CAMPAIGN LEADERS	32
CONCLUSION	35

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Heartland Alliance is to advance the human rights and respond to the human needs of endangered populations – particularly the poor, the isolated, and the displaced – through the provision of comprehensive and respectful services and the promotion of permanent solutions leading to a more just global society.

After years of work documenting hardship and poverty in Illinois, Heartland Alliance noticed a particularly upsetting trend: the average amount that families fall below the poverty line has increased over time. As a result of this deepening of poverty, individuals and families increasingly did not have the income needed to realize their most basic needs and rights spanning housing, health care, food, education, and others. The realization that extreme poverty was depriving people of their human rights led us to ask whether a deliberate use of a human rights framework could enhance and expand efforts to address poverty in Illinois. Out of this question, the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign was born. From its inception, the Campaign has raised awareness of and driven solutions to extreme poverty.

Now, more than five years after the launch of the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign, the value of using a human rights framework for building a movement and initiating change in Illinois is more apparent than ever. When the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign was launched, the idea that freedom from poverty was a human right was not on the radar of advocates, the general public, or elected officials. Since that time, the Campaign has been successful in making poverty-as-a human-rights-issue a regular part of the conversation about poverty in Illinois and has successfully rallied broad-based support for the creation of a human rights-based anti-poverty commission in Illinois.

The effectiveness of this effort is illustrated in both the big victories and the seemingly small ones. The human rights framework has empowered individuals and organizations to take on the issue of poverty with a new energy. From the woman in Peoria that sent us an email with the subject “I helped realize human rights in Illinois” and detailed a victory against predatory payday lenders in the Peoria city council, to the Village of Oak Park passing a resolution that declared freedom from poverty a human right and urged their state legislators to support the creation of a commission on poverty elimination, freedom from poverty as a human right has become central to much of the discussion about poverty throughout the state.

This paper documents some of the lessons we have learned while using the human rights framework to build and advance a campaign to eliminate extreme poverty in Illinois.

THE FROM POVERTY TO OPPORTUNITY CAMPAIGN: REALIZING HUMAN RIGHTS IN ILLINOIS

Overview

In response to the growth and deepening of poverty in Illinois and the collateral human rights consequences, the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign (the Campaign) began with a vision to eliminate poverty in Illinois. In preparation for the launch of this work, Heartland Alliance extensively researched the use of the human rights framework internationally and domestically, especially relative to economic, social, and cultural rights. We looked at the entire landscape of human rights and poverty, consulting with national experts in the field and examining poverty reduction strategies throughout the country and the world. In late 2006, with this groundwork complete, Heartland Alliance launched From Poverty to Opportunity: Realizing Human Rights in Illinois, along with 21 institutional and individual members we had gathered who had endorsed the Campaign and pledged their participation and support based on the following statement of core principles and beliefs:

- 1) Freedom from poverty is a human right.
- 2) Education on human rights and access to opportunity is a necessary component to removing existing barriers.
- 3) All human rights – civil, political, economic, social, and cultural – are indivisible, interrelated, and interdependent.
- 4) Inequality and discrimination play a central role in the existence of poverty.
- 5) Those living in extreme poverty must be engaged in the development, adoption, and enforcement of policies that grant freedom from poverty.
- 6) Poverty elimination will be progressively realized and is subject to the availability of resources.
- 7) Poverty elimination requires specific, measurable plans and policies.

From there the Campaign's work began in earnest: we trained a wide variety of constituencies to apply a human rights framework to anti-poverty policy and advocacy work in Illinois, held events to get input from stakeholders across Illinois on barriers and solutions to poverty, convened a group of advocates and a task force of legislative leaders to develop and advance state policy to cut extreme poverty in Illinois, and created a state commission to focus on the elimination of extreme poverty through the lens of human rights. Most importantly, the Campaign laid the groundwork for creating real policy change – a number of important policy victories followed and many more, we hope, are still to come.

Why Address Extreme Poverty With a Human Rights Framework?

The From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign adopts a human rights lens in its efforts to reduce extreme poverty for five key reasons:

International Precedent: Myriad

international human rights bodies and leaders have honed in on eradication of extreme poverty as a means of realizing human rights.

- ϕ The United Nations Commission on Human Rights recognizes that poverty in general and extreme poverty in particular are violations of Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides the right to an adequate standard of living and correspondingly the right to food, clothing, home, and health care. Secondly, Articles 3, 22, 23, and 26 are also seen as part of the human right not to live in poverty.
- ϕ The United Nations Millennium Declaration, which articulates the right to development and poverty reduction, established a specific goal to halve extreme poverty by 2015. On June 29, 2005, the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mehr Kahn Williams, [stated](#) that the Millennium Development Goals, "offer one of the most important opportunities ever to realize the human rights of millions of people."
- ϕ The [UN Commission on Human Rights](#) resolution 2004/23, Human rights and extreme poverty, reaffirms that "extreme poverty and exclusion from society constitute a violation of human dignity and that urgent national and international action is therefore required to eliminate

A Human Rights Platform for the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign

- ◆ ***"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."*** When poverty conditions deny people basic human needs such as food and shelter, they are denied human dignity and often must beg for food or sleep in the streets. Ending poverty eliminates the painful struggles caused by an inability to meet basic needs and contributes to the assurance of human dignity for all.
- ◆ ***"Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work."*** Poverty conditions are exacerbated by violations of the human rights to work and to receive fair pay. Unemployment in Illinois is above the national average. Fair pay in Illinois has a long way to go, as women earn less than men, and black workers earn less than white workers doing the same work. A human rights framework is superior in addressing this contributing factor to poverty because it asserts workers' rights to equality and fair pay standards.
- ◆ ***"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services."*** Poverty conditions affect human rights to health and well being when individuals cannot afford treatment or other basic needs. A living wage for Illinois is far above the minimum wage. A human rights framework is superior in developing quality of life by asserting that the right to an adequate standard of living is connected to human rights rather than the fluctuations of the economy.

Source: [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

them.” The resolution also calls upon “the General Assembly, specialized agencies, United Nations bodies and intergovernmental organizations to take into account the contradiction between the existence of situations of extreme poverty and exclusion from society, which must be overcome, and the duty to guarantee full enjoyment of human rights”.

- φ The UN Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, recognizing the growth and severity of extreme poverty, appointed an independent expert on extreme poverty in 1999. The independent expert is now known as the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.

Common Ground through Dignity: The [first article](#) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts the human right to dignity. People from all walks of life can connect to the idea that all people are equally deserving of esteem and respect. The right to dignity is a counterpoint to charity, which frequently leads to a debate about deservedness. Asserting the human right to dignity shifts the conversation from the charity perspective of deservedness to a perspective that the fulfillment of basic needs is a right to be protected. This is especially vital as in recent years charitable contributions, funding for social services and support for entitlement programs have waxed and waned.

Multiplier Effect: Protecting the right to be free of poverty leads to the realization of other rights. For example, assuring the right to safe shelter helps lead to increased personal security – another fundamental right. Solidly establishing freedom from poverty as a human right contributes to the realization of many economic and personal rights as well as to the development of health and well-being of individuals and communities.

Unity: The human rights framework has no political party or religious affiliation, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a globally recognized moral code. The framework also emphasizes interaction based on relationships and commonality. It therefore has the potential to bring together diverse audiences that are often at odds and engage them toward a shared goal. In other words, a human rights framework both provides ample room for all kinds of participation and persuasively calls on all people to actively contribute to the ongoing process of creating human dignity and social development.

Progressive Realization of Rights: Human rights approaches to poverty reduction recognize that all human rights may not be achieved immediately. In recognition of resource constraints, a human rights approach allows for a progressive realization of rights over a period of time and for the setting of priorities among rights in the course of this progressive realization. In Illinois, it was and is not likely we will be able to eradicate poverty or even halve extreme poverty in the short run, especially given the state’s ever-mounting financial crisis and shrinking available revenue. Our focus on extreme poverty and human rights is simply a first step – those living in extreme poverty are the most vulnerable and are in great immediate need economically, socially, and civically, so this focus was a logical place to start.

Defining Extreme Poverty

Early on, we knew that a campaign about extreme poverty would need to rely on data and statistics about extreme poverty to both influence the Campaign’s decisions and recommendations and to mobilize and energize people around the problem of poverty. The Campaign’s human rights framework and specific focus on extreme poverty created a natural link to international efforts to eliminate extreme poverty. However, the international definition of extreme poverty, living on less than \$1 a day, had little practical application for the Campaign. Instead, the Campaign looked to the U.S. federal poverty guidelines. By that measure, a family with income below 50% of the federal poverty guideline is considered to be living in extreme poverty. That amounts to a family of four living on less than \$11,775 a year.

At the start of the Campaign, over 607,000 people in Illinois were living in extreme poverty. At presentations and trainings on extreme poverty and human rights that we facilitated, sharing the income guidelines helped people think about what it would be like for them to try to survive on less than \$5,745 a year or envision the struggles of a family experiencing extreme poverty, like a single mom trying to care for a young child on \$7,000. These types of reflections helped us gain Campaign endorsers and mobilize supporters. The poverty guidelines and the number of people experiencing poverty in Illinois were powerful tools in helping supporters realize the need for change.

2013 U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines		
Family Size	Poverty (0-99% FPL)	Extreme Poverty (0-49% FPL)
1	\$11,490	\$5,745
2	\$15,510	\$7,755
3	\$19,530	\$9,765
4	\$23,550	\$11,775

Key Components of the Campaign

In order to create a human rights movement that would enhance and expand the efforts to address extreme poverty in Illinois, the Campaign took a multi-faceted approach to creating change. The key components of the Campaign are described below.

Education: Demystifying Human Rights, Poverty, and the Campaign

A core component of the human rights framework is education. Heartland Alliance developed human rights and extreme poverty trainings for a variety of audiences. The following are some examples of training exercises used.

TRAINING EXERCISE I: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Purpose: To begin to understand the content of the Universal Declaration and how it relates to our lives.

Task: Each group is given one section (“Article”) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The group should designate a spokesperson and the spokesperson should read the section aloud. The group should then work together to answer the following questions:

- 1.) Give three examples of how this right is compromised (violated) in the U.S. For example, note whether we are failing to respect, protect, and/or fulfill that right.
- 2.) Give three examples of how this right is upheld. For each example, note whether we are respecting, protecting, and/or fulfilling that right.

Note: While facilitating this particular training exercise, we chose articles which were closely associated with challenges faced by people experiencing extreme poverty (Article 23, Article 25, and Article 26).

TRAINING EXERCISE II: Linking Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

Purpose: To begin to understand the difficulties of living in extreme poverty and how poverty is a human rights issue.

Task: The group should designate a spokesperson and the spokesperson should read aloud the following scenario, and then answer the questions below.

Paul, Sara, and their two children live in a community of 5,000 in southern Illinois. Paul lost his job at the coal plant five years ago when it closed down. Since then, he has held a few different part-time jobs paying around minimum wage. Sara stays home with the children because the baby, having been born with a heart problem, needs intensive medical assistance. All the children are enrolled in the state’s child health insurance program, All Kids, but there are no doctors in their county that accept it. They rent a single family home that has several problems – chipping paint, cracked windows, poor plumbing – and are often late on the rent. Their income is typically around \$8,000 for the year.

- 1.) List six different problems that this family faces.
- 2.) Brainstorm a list of changes that could help the family. (Include both short- and long-term changes.)
- 3.) Think about the answers from the last exercise on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For this family, what (if any), rights are being violated?

In addition, we created a number of other educational materials, including releasing several reports and briefs to help advance awareness and solutions. Some examples are listed here.

- ◆ **Extreme Poverty & Human Rights: [A Primer](#):** This primer provides tools that focus on the role of human rights in eradicating poverty. It defines what it means to be extremely poor and how many people live in extreme poverty—globally and locally. It also identifies the rights guaranteed equally to every human being, which have been promised by the United Nations and by the United States government, and establishes that freedom from extreme poverty is the most basic of human rights. Finally, this primer highlights global and local efforts to fulfill human rights and eradicate extreme poverty and what each of us can do to help move all of humankind from poverty to opportunity.
- ◆ **Realizing Human Rights in Illinois: [A Report on the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign Action Forums](#):** This report chronicles the Campaign’s travels across Illinois from Carlinville to Evanston to Madison to Chicago’s west side to 20 different community action forums where individuals spoke to the reality that poverty is the absence of human rights. This understanding fueled thoughtful, involved conversations about the barriers for people experiencing poverty and the solutions that need to be in place to give people real opportunity. While hundreds of ideas were shared by those who participated in the forum process, a few overarching themes and action steps emerged, including that society must start to prioritize addressing poverty and that the causes and solutions to poverty are interrelated and therefore attempts to address poverty should be undertaken holistically.
- ◆ **Poverty Elimination Strategies that Work: [This report](#)** provides snapshots of eight issue areas that contribute to poverty, examples of local strategies for addressing poverty, and resources

for implementing local solutions, with a special emphasis on extreme poverty. The report was intended to help policymakers, community groups, foundations, service providers, advocates, and faith communities identify, support, and promote proven poverty elimination strategies that meet the needs of the individuals and families experiencing poverty in their communities. It includes numerous local solutions that are currently being implemented in communities around the state and the country. These examples are meant to serve as a catalyst for local planning to create solutions that leverage a community's assets to fundamentally address poverty. Whenever possible, hyperlinks to sources are included that contain additional information about a given solution.

Additionally, the Campaign created a host of other tools to support the dialogue about poverty-as-a-human-rights-issue – fact sheets, frequently asked questions, endorsement forms – are available on Heartland Alliance's [website](#).

Community Involvement: Events and Hearings

The Campaign conducted 20 community action forums throughout Illinois that were attended by more than 700 individuals. The forums were co-sponsored by Heartland Alliance and by local community organizations. Each of the forums brought together a wide range of individuals – people experiencing poverty, individuals working with an organization addressing issues of poverty, local and state elected officials, concerned citizens, and other stakeholders – to discuss poverty and opportunity in their communities. All of the forums included the following:

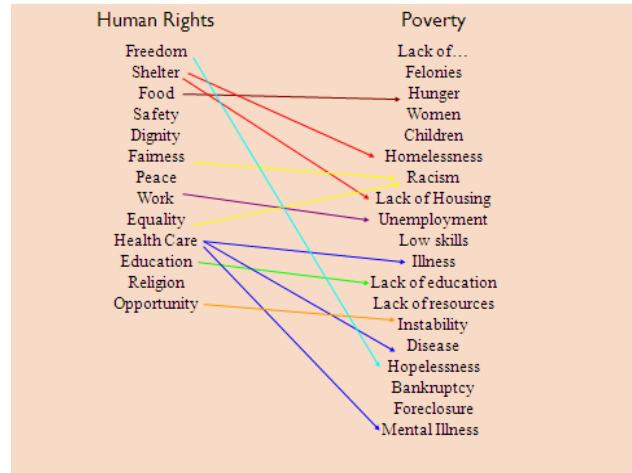
- A presentation on the current state of poverty in Illinois and the community where the forum was held.
- Small and large group conversations about what must be done to provide real opportunity to those experiencing poverty.
- A presentation on the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign, including an introduction to poverty as a human rights issue.



At most of the forums, the group undertook a simple activity that was particularly effective at educating people about the links between poverty and human rights. First, facilitators asked participants to say the first things that came to mind when they heard the words 'human rights' and the facilitator wrote down the list of these ideas for all to see. Next, facilitators asked participants to say the first words that come to mind when they heard 'poverty'. These answers were listed next to the human rights list. Then the facilitators drew lines making connections between the two lists where two ends of a spectrum

emerged. For example while ‘housing’ was frequently listed under human rights, ‘homelessness’ was listed under poverty. When people indicated ‘health care’ for human rights, ‘illness’ was listed under poverty. Most of the individuals that participated in the action forums had never thought about the relationship between poverty and human rights before, and this exercise and the forum as a whole brought home for them a basic concept: poverty is the absence of human rights.

These are a couple examples of how this exercise looked upon completion:



The Campaign connected this concept to the little known passage in the [Preamble to the Illinois Constitution](#), which states:

“We, the People of the State of Illinois...in order to...eliminate poverty and inequality; assure legal, social and economic justice; provide opportunity for the fullest development of the individual... do ordain and establish this Constitution for the State of Illinois.”

Participants’ reactions to this passage from the Illinois Constitution ranged from frustration to hopefulness. Many were troubled by the State’s failure to focus on this goal, while others saw it as a call to action. We too, saw these words as a call to action - that now was the time to take these words and make them real, a call that through our collective action and voice, we can realize human rights and end poverty in Illinois. We used these forums to engage participants in our call.

The From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign provided an opportunity for attendees to immediately connect to others around the state committed to taking action to eliminate extreme poverty in Illinois and a way to remain informed and engaged by signing up for more information. To capture the input provided during the forums, Heartland Alliance released a report which in turn served as the backdrop for the Campaign’s policy agenda and our advocacy moving forward.

The Campaign also looked for other opportunities to share our message and deepen the conversation about human rights and poverty. For example, in December 2008, Heartland Alliance and the Office of the Governor hosted a poverty summit, called “Opportunities for Change: Taking Action to End Extreme Poverty in Illinois,” which engaged advocates and stakeholders in a two-day discussion about extreme poverty. In May of 2009, Heartland Alliance brought together over 100 individuals from across the state for a [Lobby Day and Rally](#) to encourage Illinois legislators to support the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign’s legislative agenda.



Likewise, the Campaign organized a [Virtual Day of Action](#) in December of 2010 to celebrate International Human Right’s Day and the release of the Poverty Commission’s Poverty Elimination Strategy. The Virtual Day of Action provided a variety of ways for individuals interested in the Campaign to learn more about poverty and human rights and to get more involved. Campaign supporters were encouraged to learn more, to test their knowledge through online quizzes, to share their thoughts via an online forum and to spread the word about the Campaign through social media. The Day of Action also included a series of blog posts, personal stories, expert testimony and an [audio conference](#) hosted by CLASP’s [Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity](#), where state legislators and experts discussed the Commission’s recommendations.

Creating Ownership: Campaign Endorsements

As we conducted trainings, held forums, and gave presentations throughout the state, we also asked individuals and organizations to endorse the Campaign. Heartland Alliance staff used a [Campaign Endorsement Form](#) to gather information from endorsers. We integrated a discussion about the Campaign and endorsement into nearly all of our external work – including work not directly under the umbrella of the Campaign – bringing endorsement forms anywhere we were asked to participate in a discussion or make a presentation. In this way, we aimed to cast a wider net. A version of the endorsement form was also posted on Heartland

From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign
Realizing Human Rights in Illinois

Campaign Endorsement Form

Yes, I believe that freedom from poverty is a human right. Everyone in Illinois should have the opportunity to put food on their table, a roof over their head and give their kids a chance at a bright future, but that opportunity does not exist for the hundreds of thousands of people in Illinois living in extreme poverty. Freedom from this barrier requires a comprehensive vision and plan that will reduce the number of Illinoisans living in extreme poverty by half in the 2015.

I support the **From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign**.

I am endorsing as an Individual Organization Both

Name _____ Title _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

How would you like to be involved? (check all that apply)

I would like to receive e-mail updates on the Campaign.

I would like to help organize a From Poverty to Opportunity Action Forum in my community.

I would like to receive e-mail action alerts on legislation impacting poverty.

I would like to talk to my legislator about the Campaign.

I would like to learn more about poverty as a human rights issue.

I would like a presentation on the Campaign for a group I work with, have someone contact me.

Other (please specify) _____

Additional Comments/Questions?

Alliance's website to provide an easy way for interested parties to endorse the Campaign online.

The endorsement form affirmatively states that the endorser believes that freedom from poverty is a human right. Our hope was not just to generate interest in the Campaign, but also to engage supporters more deeply through an endorsement process so that they felt ownership in the Campaign and the work to address extreme poverty using a human rights lens.

After this initial endorsement push, the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign gained individual and organizational endorsers in every legislative district in the state. The organizational endorsers included community based organizations, human services providers, faith communities, unions, policy organizations, and even a number of local townships. Today the Campaign has approximately 3,000 individual and organizational endorsers.

State Poverty Commission and Poverty Elimination Plan

Creating a State Poverty Commission

The forums helped crystalize that efforts to eliminate poverty must be undertaken by many people in many different ways, but that to truly advance the systems-level change necessary to eliminate poverty, an institutionalized, dedicated entity was needed. A state-level commission, in particular, seemed like a good approach because it would ensure that advocates, service providers, decision makers and people directly impacted by poverty would all play a role in developing a plan for the state. Through the process of developing the state plan, ownership and investment in the plan would develop and the right people would be at the table to advance and implement many of the Commission's recommendations.

Members of the Campaign worked together to advance legislation that created a human-rights based state commission to address extreme poverty. Ultimately, 70 legislators co-sponsored [HB4369](#), which was unanimously approved in May 2008 and signed by Governor Rod Blagojevich on August 15, 2008. The Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty ("the Commission") is the first such commission in the country that focuses on poverty elimination in a manner consistent with international human rights standards. The Commission has two basic charges:

- Create and monitor a specific, substantive, measureable strategic plan for cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015 in Illinois.
- Offer advice and comment on state matters that may positively or negatively impact the state's goal of ending poverty.

The [Commission](#) is comprised of members of the Illinois General Assembly, the Office of the Governor, and members of the public that represent different issues and constituencies relevant to addressing poverty. In addition, representatives from key state agencies and other commissions serve on the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty in an ex-officio capacity. Staff support for the Commission is

provided by Heartland Alliance and the Governor's Office. The Commission is unfunded, and therefore Commissioners are not paid for their service, and Heartland Alliance must raise outside support in order to properly staff the Commission.

As a kick-off to the work of the Commission, Heartland Alliance staff facilitated human rights trainings for the Commission to familiarize Commissioners with human rights principles and to help them better contextualize what addressing poverty in Illinois in a manner consistent with international human rights standards would look like. Many Commissioners were introduced to poverty as a human rights issue for the first time at these trainings and so initial comfort with the overall approach varied among members. The value of the human rights framework, however, has been proven over time. The human rights framework has provided the Commission a clear set of principles to anchor and guide their work as they developed a poverty elimination plan for the state and as they evaluate the merits of policy proposals that advance or run counter to that plan.

Developing the Commission's Plan to Cut Extreme Poverty

The newly formed Commission's first task was to develop its plan to cut extreme poverty. As it developed the plan, the Commission was required to address the following primary issues:

- Access to safe, decent, and affordable housing.
- Access to adequate food and nutrition.
- Access to affordable and quality health care.
- Equal access to quality education and training.
- Dependable and affordable transportation.
- Access to quality and affordable child care.
- Opportunities to engage in meaningful and sustainable work.
- The availability of adequate income supports.

To help inform and structure the Commission's work to develop a poverty elimination plan, Heartland Alliance conducted a tailored data analyses that looked in-depth at who was living in extreme poverty in Illinois and key characteristics of those groups such as attachment to work and education, family composition, and health and disability status. Using this information, the Commission created three working groups to develop preliminary recommendations for their plan to reduce poverty:

- Living with Dignity – Focused on solutions for those unable or not expected to work
- Making Work Accessible – Focused on solutions for those disconnected from the workforce
- Making Work Pay – Focused on solutions for those engaged in work but still experiencing extreme poverty

Each of these working groups was chaired by a member of the Commission's 7-person steering committee and included both members of the Commission, as well as others who could provide relevant expertise. These recommendations eventually made their way into the Commission's poverty elimination plan.

The Commission also held three public hearings throughout Illinois, where the Commission asked Illinois residents to share their ideas about what the State should do in order to reach the goal of cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015. The information gathered by the Commission during these hearings helped ground the development of the Commission's plan in the real needs of individuals experiencing poverty.

Ultimately, the work of the three working groups and the information gathered at the Commission hearings culminated in the drafting and release of the Commission's poverty elimination strategy, [Building A Pathway to Dignity & Work](#), released in conjunction with International Human Rights Day on December 9, 2010. The Commission's plan offers a comprehensive strategy to significantly reduce extreme poverty in Illinois. Several rights – adequate housing, adequate food, adequate health care, decent work, adequate education and adequate livelihood – are defined within the strategy. The plan's recommendations include establishing a statewide transitional jobs program, making the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program more accessible and better connected to workforce strategies, and expanding the scholarships available to students in poverty so they can attend community college. By providing enhanced supports and creating the infrastructure necessary for individuals to be treated with dignity and be able to access sustained work, the Commission's plan was intended to create new pathways to opportunity for individuals living in extreme poverty.

Annual Hearings and Progress Reports

Consistent with its statutory charge, the Commission monitors the State's progress toward implementing its poverty elimination plan and meeting the goal of cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015. The Commission is required to hold at least one public hearing and release a progress report annually. The Commission, however, has chosen to conduct three hearings each year in different regions of the state to provide a real opportunity for the Commission to meet and learn from individuals experiencing poverty throughout the state.

As it did when it crafted its poverty elimination plan, the Commission uses the information from the public hearings to shape and inform an annual progress report. The annual report, also mandated by the enacting statute, takes stock of the State's progress in implementing the Commission's plan and reaching the Commission's goal of halving extreme poverty. The report weaves in stories from the annual hearings, as well as information about the major administrative and policy changes that have occurred throughout the year that advance or detract from the Commission's goals, in order to paint a picture of the State's progress in addressing extreme poverty.

As with the Commission's plan, each year every member of the General Assembly receives a copy of the Commission's annual report. Commissioners and members of the Campaign then use the report as an accountability tool to show decision-makers where progress needs to be made.

The Commission's reports are below:

[2011 Annual Report](#)

The 2011 Annual Report notes the hardship families experiencing extreme poverty faced following the Great Recession. In the report the Commission noted that "strong and effective public benefits and human services are crucial to keeping families afloat until the economy recovers, yet policymakers passed a state budget with significant cuts to programs and services that provide supports for people experiencing extreme poverty." The Commission also provided an overview of bills introduced during the 97th General Assembly that aligned with the Poverty Commission's recommendations and provided the 2011 outcome for each piece of legislation.

[2012 Annual Report](#)

The Commission's annual reports are intended to be a tool to hold decision-makers in the state accountable for the state's progress in addressing extreme poverty. In 2012, the Commission's report did just that: the Commission made clear that decision-makers needed to do more. The Commission noted that "critical programs that have kept those hovering on the edge from falling into extreme poverty were cut." Programs like child care, community mental health, education, and health care that have been critical resources for thousands have been slashed." The report was a renewed call to action to take on poverty at the state level. As in the prior year, the report also summarized the testimony at the Commission's annual hearings and provided an overview of the bills introduced during the legislative session that aligned with the Commission's recommendations and the outcome of those efforts.

Other Commission Events

The Campaign has been successful in encouraging the Commission to engage in other events beyond the annual hearings. The Commission routinely sponsors or co-sponsors events that raise the profile of poverty issues in Illinois or provide a greater opportunity for people impacted by poverty to engage with Commissioners and other decision-makers. For example, in 2012 the Governor's Office and the Commission co-sponsored a "Meet and Greet" at the Governor's Mansion where impacted individuals, advocates, and decision-makers gathered to discuss eliminating poverty. Similarly, in 2013, the Commission hosted a film-screening about poverty in Cairo, Illinois, and provided a breakfast and briefing for legislators and their staff to provide them with information about extreme poverty in Illinois, educate them about anti-poverty programs, and highlight solutions to poverty. These events keep Commissioners engaged in the work and ensures that the Commission is a recognized voice in matters related to poverty.

Policy Presence

The Commission also directly weighs in on policy proposals. The Commission has developed a legislative working group to monitor policy proposals. This subcommittee meets periodically to evaluate policy proposals using the human rights framework and the Commission’s plan to reduce extreme poverty to guide its analysis. The subcommittee then makes recommendations to the full Commission about the policies the Commission ought to support or oppose. From there, the Commission develops a legislative watch list and takes formal positions on legislative initiatives. In doing so, the Commission reminds legislators that their decisions affect the lives of those living in or at risk of poverty.

Campaign Communications

Shortly after the Campaign was established, members discussed the need for well thought out messaging and some communications training to become comfortable talking about human rights, particularly in a way that would resonate with intended audiences, potential allies, policymakers, and the media. Heartland Alliance worked with [The Opportunity Agenda](#) to observe focus group testing of human rights messaging and drew from many of their lessons learned and takeaways. More nuanced messaging was then applied to all the Campaign materials and presentations.

To encourage widespread use of the Campaign’s materials, Heartland Alliance created and continues to maintain a From Poverty to Opportunity web presence (www.heartlandalliance.org/poverty) that provides access to downloadable materials and resources related to the Campaign and the ability to directly engage with decision makers and weigh in on policy solutions through action alerts.

The Campaign’s website also links users to Heartland Alliance’s policy and advocacy blog. The blog offers Campaign endorsers and other interested parties information about issues related to poverty and human rights and has provided a mechanism for further engaging supporters in the Campaign’s advocacy efforts.

Lessons Learned from The Opportunity Agenda **Themes to Guide Message Development**

- ◆ ***Lead with values.*** Fairness, dignity, opportunity, and pride in America’s heritage and founding principles, were ranked highly by all audiences as a reason why human rights are important.
- ◆ ***Begin with supportive audiences and work outward.*** Start with groups who are supportive or persuadable on human rights and then work to create new audiences by identifying the most likely future allies.
- ◆ ***Emphasize consensus issues to introduce the idea of human rights generally.*** Equal opportunity, freedom from torture, education and health care are each widely accepted as human rights.
- ◆ ***Start conversations with the goal – upholding human rights – rather than the process.*** Audiences have almost no knowledge of treaties and mechanisms and care less about their existence than they do about the conditions such vehicles are meant to address.
- ◆ ***Then move to specific examples.*** This will illustrate the effectiveness of thinking about social justice issues through a human rights lens. Audiences do not immediately see the implication of viewing an issue as a human right and are likely to view human rights merely as inspiring ideals without concrete examples of their impact.

Source: The Opportunity Agenda. [Talking Human Rights in the United States – A Communications Toolkit.](#)

To continue capturing the stories of people impacted by poverty beyond the action forums and hearings, we created The Story Project to document first-hand accounts of individuals who have experienced extreme poverty. The Campaign developed an interview tool kit for volunteers interested in gathering stories to support the Campaign's work. The tool kit included the following documents:

[Interview Steps](#)

[Introduction to Interview](#)

[Interview Instructions](#)

[Interview Questions](#)

Campaign staff gathered numerous written stories and videotaped interviews by way of targeted outreach and with the help of interns, partner organizations, and other volunteers. Through the Story Project, the Campaign sought to put a human face to poverty, help illuminate how complex the issues related to poverty can be, provide a platform for individuals experiencing poverty to tell their story, build leadership, and provide insight into solutions to address poverty.

As the Campaign evolved, we have looked for expanded opportunities to share stories and put a human face to the Campaign's work. Much of the testimony from the 2012 hearings was recorded and the video of the testimony was embedded in the Commission's annual report. Likewise, the Campaign worked with the Poverty Commission to create a number of events to engage legislators and agency heads and connect them with impacted individuals and their stories, like the 2012 "Meet and Greet" or the recent film screening of [*Between Two Rivers*](#) which focuses on poverty in Cairo, Illinois.

Promotion of Policy Change - Moving Forward

The work of the Commission gives context to the work of the members of the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign. The Commission provides a vision for reducing extreme poverty and a framework for holding the state accountable, while members of the Campaign continue the hands-on work of crafting and advancing policy and systems changes that advance the Commission's and the Campaign's goals. Each year, Heartland Alliance and other advocate members of the Campaign develop and advance policy solutions that further the goals of the Campaign and fit within the Commission's plan to eliminate poverty.

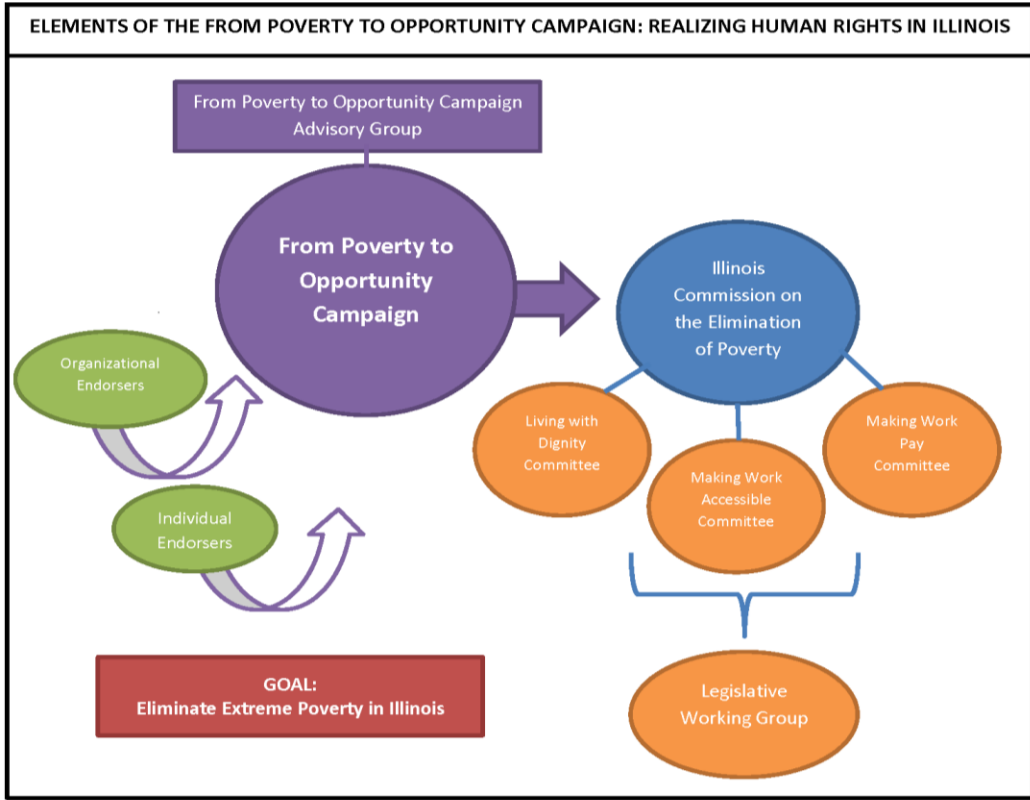
The Campaign has provided a space where advocates can share their ideas and collaborate to move change forward. Sometimes these conversations are the result of formal Campaign meetings, other times informal conversations among members. Poverty fact sheets and other materials developed by the Campaign provide a ready set of tools to buttress this policy work. In recent years, Campaign members have together successfully moved a number of policy solutions forward, including the reinstatement of some of the lost funding for homeless prevention and homeless youth programs, an increase in the earned income tax credit for low-income families, and the removal of the asset test from TANF cash assistance.

Today, our anti-poverty work happens in a number of ways. We work with our network of members through a variety of coalitions to identify and implement specific strategies to advance solutions to poverty and defend against policies that would move Illinois's work to reduce poverty backward. We are deepening relationships with member organizations to help them build capacity to more fully engage in a holistic anti-poverty policy agenda. We identify and create opportunities for people impacted by poverty to share their stories and advocate for solutions to poverty. We purposefully identify and advance no-cost policy solutions in order to develop legislative champions and create momentum in the midst of the state's financial crisis and the recent wave of devastating cuts to safety net programs. Finally, we circle back to the human rights frame to ground ourselves as we develop the Campaign's next steps, identify its priorities, and keep the drumbeat going.

Examples of Policy Victories Supported by the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty

The following are examples of policies supported by the Commission. Nearly all of the policy successes supported by the Commission were launched and advanced by members of the Campaign.

- ◆ ***Expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).*** In 2012, Illinois doubled the size of the credit to 10 percent of the federal EITC, helping low-income, working families keep a little more of their paychecks.
- ◆ ***Eliminated the Asset Test from the TANF Program.*** In 2013 the Illinois legislature passed a bill to remove the asset test from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program removing a barrier to savings and financial security for families experiencing extreme poverty.
- ◆ ***Expanded Convictions Eligible for Sealing.*** In 2013, the Illinois legislature passed a bill that would allow the courts to consider the sealing of criminal records for five additional felony convictions, increasing reducing barriers to housing and employment for certain individuals with criminal backgrounds.
- ◆ ***Medicaid Expansion.*** The state legislature passed a bill in 2013 that would expand Medicaid to nearly 350,000 Illinoisans. The expansion of Medicaid will help single adults experiencing poverty realize the human right to health care.



LESSONS LEARNED

A Human Rights Approach Effectively Moves the Poverty Conversation Away from Charity and Toward Dignity and Justice

As we had hoped when we launched the Campaign, one of our most significant lessons has been that using a human rights frame does indeed fundamentally change the conversation about poverty and helps to reframe the way we view poverty. A human rights perspective squarely focuses the debate on systems change and moves away from a charity perspective. The range of invested champions and the diversity of endorsers that have supported the Campaign shows how staying true to the fundamental concepts of dignity and justice can move a Campaign forward.

A Strong Organizational Foundation Supports Quick Campaign Start-up and Stability

For many reasons Heartland Alliance offered a perfect breeding ground and foundation for the development of the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign. The Campaign grew out of an organization with a 125 year history of working to meet the needs of the poor, the isolated, and the displaced and that in the past 20 years had intentionally refocused the organizational mission, culture, and approach to align with international human rights standards. As a service-based human rights organization with a commitment to research and policy-driven solutions, Heartland Alliance was uniquely suited to offer the organizational support for the Campaign. An in-house research and policy staff that had conducted years of research on poverty and education of media and the legislature lent tremendous credibility and expertise to the Campaign. In addition, Heartland Alliance was committed to building the necessary infrastructure to ensure the Campaign's success through fundraising and hiring committed and experienced staff to launch and lead the Campaign.

Whether the genesis of an organization or a strong coalition, the development of a human rights campaign will be most effective when individuals and stakeholders with an expertise in poverty and human rights are engaged in the effort and those carrying the mantle recognize that such a campaign is a multi-year effort to educate and engage communities and create a long-term agenda.

The Human Rights Framework Promotes Coming Together with One Voice

The human rights framework created a space and an overarching set of values that helped bring together a diverse group of individuals and organizations concerned about poverty and committed to social justice, whether or not they agree on the specifics of the problem or the details of the solutions. The From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign is unique in that it brings together and defines a common purpose for organizations that work on a broad array of issue areas and have different approaches to their work. The core principles of the Campaign and the guiding principal that freedom from poverty is a

human right helped to bring together Campaign endorsers and helped this diverse group advocate with one voice. Housing groups, child care advocates, food and nutrition groups, health care coalitions, and other single-issue organizations came together because the Campaign helped folks better conceptualize the interconnectedness of all of these issues and better appreciate the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing poverty.

Over the course of the Campaign, the language that partner organizations use has begun to subtly shift as the holistic vision of an anti-poverty strategy has become more embedded in a wide variety of discussions. For example, the executive director of one of our partners, which focuses primarily on access to affordable quality child care and early childhood education, consistently lifts up cutting poverty as an essential part of the solution. “As long as we tolerate the obscenity of our children growing up in extreme poverty, interventions like high quality early childhood education do not, at the end of the day, matter much at all,” explained Maria Whelan, President & CEO of Illinois Action for Children.

Many more groups directly or indirectly associated with the Campaign have become increasingly interested in incorporating human rights language and goals into their work. One example is [The United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations](#), whose leadership reached out to Campaign staff to better understand some of the pros and cons of using the human rights framework before deciding to re-brand their organization as a multi-ethnic human rights alliance. Similarly, Housing Action Illinois, a Campaign endorser and leader, declares housing is a human right as an expression of the organization’s values on their [website](#). The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, both Campaign members, have each used human rights language in their advocacy alerts and communications since the launch of the Campaign. A special issue of the Shriver Center’s [Clearinghouse Review: Journal of Poverty Law and Policy](#), applied a human rights lens to poverty law practice. We are pleased that the dialogue about poverty as a human rights issue is spreading and look forward to continuing to fan the flames of the discussion.

The From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign mobilized a broad base of constituents while the human rights lens newly energized long-time advocates to speak with one voice about the need to reduce extreme poverty.

Being Intentional About Messaging and Language Helps New Audiences Hear and Understand Human Rights More Effectively

The Campaign relied heavily on the wisdom and resources of [The Opportunity Agenda](#) to inform messaging and language used in materials and presentations. Focused on moving hearts, minds, and policy over time, the organization works with social justice groups, leaders, and movements to advance solutions that expand opportunity for everyone. Two particularly valuable resources Heartland Alliance relied upon include:

[Human Rights in the U.S. – Opinion Research with Advocates, Journalists and the General Public](#)

[Talking Human Rights in the United States, A Communications Toolkit – Tips, tools, and techniques for building public support to uphold human rights at home](#)

From these reports and our experience it became clear that how we talked about human rights really mattered, as did understanding our audiences. We learned the following:

Lead With Values. Linking human rights values to the more familiar foundational values of the United States can be useful in introducing people to human rights concepts and framework. For example, as Americans, we place a high value on ensuring everyone has the chance to improve their lives and make ends meet. Rather than lead with the term “right” or “human right” the Campaign would use messaging which connects with values such as equal opportunity. For example, “everyone should have the opportunity to put a roof over their head, food on the table and give their kids a chance at a bright future.” Those living in extreme poverty, however, are often facing so many barriers that they are excluded from that opportunity.

The American value of opportunity is also a human rights value. Our ability to exercise our civil and political rights is dependent on the stability of our lives. When barriers such as homelessness, unemployment or low-paying work, and hunger stand in our way, we cannot fully participate in society. Consequently, the absence of economic security is the absence of human rights. Living in extreme poverty is an acute example of the deprivation of opportunity – the deprivation of human rights.

As Amy Rynell, Heartland Alliance’s Senior Director of Research & Policy describes, “Invoking the values embedded in the U.S Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other familiar documents, is a way of signaling that we are no longer bringing a concept completely alien to our history and tradition to domestic policy, but rather reinvigorating our basic commitments and beliefs.”

Use ‘Bridging’ Language. Many groups and individuals had trouble conceptualizing how to apply the human rights frame to our domestic anti-poverty advocacy either because they only associated human rights with international issues, with civil and political rights, or they had no real concept of human rights. In naming the Campaign From Poverty to Opportunity and developing the Campaign’s foundational documents, Heartland Alliance was intentional about using bridging language to help make the connection between the human rights frame and a framework, opportunity, that is more familiar to and digestible for a wider variety of potential partner organizations.

An example of this bridging language can be seen on the Campaign endorsement form – “Yes, I believe that everyone in Illinois should have the opportunity to put food on their table, a roof over their head, and give their kids a chance at a bright future, but that opportunity does not exist for the hundreds of thousands of people in Illinois living in extreme poverty.” With the use of bridging language, the Campaign was able to engage allies on basic human rights principles without explicitly using potentially unfamiliar or inaccessible human rights language.

Policymakers Require a Different Approach from Other Audiences When It Comes to Human Rights

Many experienced policy advocates initially involved with the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign questioned the value of the human rights frame especially in advocacy with policymakers. Some advocates felt that the language would hinder the Campaign's efforts and become a distraction rather than add value to the Campaign's efforts. These concerns were not entirely misplaced.

As we worked to expand the dialogue about poverty as a human rights issue, Heartland Alliance also found that leading with the human rights language and frame can turn off certain decision-makers.

Referring to "rights" with a policymaker who has little understanding of human rights or how they apply to domestic policy can sometime trigger unexpected reactions. Many hear the word "right" and bristle about the creation of an entitlement society. While this reaction may not be unique with policymakers, given the nature of advocacy and the limited time that we often have to educate decision-makers, using overt human rights language may create an unnecessary barrier to advancing policy change. Many policymakers may acknowledge that all Illinoisans have the human right to public education, some may acknowledge the human right to health care, but it is harder to find a policymaker that would acknowledge the human right to work and to protection against unemployment.

Instead, using bridging language or alternative language that captures the essence of the human rights framework without explicitly using human rights language with policymakers helped us avoid barriers and provided more value in conversations with legislators and while developing leadership on critical poverty issues.

Beyond a change in approach, one of the more effective strategies to educate policymakers about extreme poverty through a human rights frame has been our legislative district factsheets. These factsheets provide district-specific poverty data for each legislator and highlight the number of their constituents experiencing poverty and the challenges that go along with it. We have distributed these factsheets as companion pieces to factsheets on substantive policy proposals or in more formal meetings with legislators and have used them as a backdrop in testimony regarding poverty in Illinois. The specificity and the localized nature of the data captures legislators' attention in a compelling way.

In developing the most recent version the fact sheets for the upcoming legislative session, we were intentional about aligning the data points with the policy priorities of the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign and the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty. We included data points related to the number of individuals working year-round but still living in poverty to help initiate a conversation about the proposed increase to the minimum wage and a proposed domestic workers bill of rights. We also included data about the number of individuals in a particular district who are uninsured, and how many would become insured when the Affordable Care Act is implemented, to help generate support for Medicaid expansion in Illinois.

- ϕ [Extreme Poverty Fact Sheet for Senate District 1 \(2012\)](#)
- ϕ [Extreme Poverty Fact Sheet for House District 1 \(2013\)](#)

It Is Important, Though Challenging, to Create a Drumbeat to Sustain Attention and Support Over Time

Over the course of the Campaign we have seen that the interest in poverty from the media, the general public, and lawmakers ebbs and flows. Campaign leaders identified the need to create a drumbeat and consistently work to make sure that poverty is part of the conversation even when there is little appetite for talking about or addressing poverty. The Campaign committed to consistently working to connect issues such as affordable housing, unemployment, and access to health care back to poverty and human rights.

In order to keep the drumbeat consistent, the Campaign applied a whole host of communications strategies:

Use Multiple Methods of Electronic Communications. The Campaign used multiple methods of communications to reach a broad audience and be easily accessible, including the Campaign’s website, blog, and through the collection of stories. Heartland Alliance staff and Campaign leaders utilized [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) as social media tools to regularly engage with followers and share information about poverty as a human rights issue. In addition, Heartland Alliance’s president, Dr. Sid Mohn, contributes a monthly blog post on poverty and human rights to the [Huffington Post](#) as one more way to increase the visibility of poverty in Illinois. Early on, the From Poverty to Opportunity blog served an important role in developing the coalition of stakeholders by keeping Campaign endorsers connected to each other, providing updates about Campaign events, information about issues impacting poverty, opportunities to engage in advocacy and building momentum statewide.

Adjust Messaging When Necessary. We found that the media’s coverage of the “newly poor” and interest in poverty issues following the Great Recession spiked dramatically. We adjusted our messaging during this period of time in an effort to tell the story of those individuals who were experiencing poverty long before the recession began: “Those who had the least to start with before the recession were the first hit, they were hit the hardest, and they will recover the slowest.”

Let the Drumbeat Evolve. As a Campaign progresses, the drumbeat changes. Whereas four years ago, introducing the Campaign to new potential endorsers was key to creating momentum, our current challenges are crafting policy solutions that are winnable and keeping decision-makers and advocates engaged in an anti-poverty strategy even when the state has no money to invest in anti-poverty programs and is instead whittling away at existing programs with each new state budget. Similarly, the resources available to a

Campaign change as funding for a long-term Campaign may change over time. A continuous evaluation of what the drumbeat should sound like given the stage of the Campaign and the resources available will help keep that drumbeat sustainable.

Use Human Rights Language in Media Quotes So It Cannot Be Edited Out. Incorporating human rights language into press releases and in interviews with reporters has been an intentional part of our communications strategy. We learned that media outlets tended to edit the human rights language out of any written materials provided to them. One way that we have been successful inserting human rights language into media coverage of poverty is by incorporating it into the quotes that we include in our press releases. In doing so, we have been successful in having that language show up in media articles related to poverty in a way that cannot be modified. One example is the following quote that appeared in a [press release](#) send out by the Illinois Governor’s office about the Opportunity for Change Summit hosted by Heartland Alliance and the Governor’s office:

“The Opportunities for Change Summit is an important step towards identifying and acting on specific proposals that will provide real opportunity for the close to 700,000 people in Illinois experiencing extreme poverty,” said Sid Mohn, President of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights. “I and my colleagues on the new Commission on the Elimination of Poverty are excited to engage in this conversation and use the ideas coming from the summit to create a plan that will realize the human rights of the most vulnerable in our state.”

Create Multiple Avenues for Engagement of Leaders Experiencing Poverty

Consistent with the human rights framework, the Campaign recruited and works to continually engage individuals experiencing poverty to participate in a full range of activities. Heartland Alliance approaches policy and advocacy with the philosophy that policy solutions must be grounded in and informed by individuals experiencing poverty. This philosophy was a critical component of the Campaign’s guiding principles and has been an important standard that Heartland Alliance has worked to ensure. Some specific ways we have attempted to facilitate engagement include:

Mandate Inclusion of Impacted Populations in the Process. One intentional way that the Campaign worked to ensure that individuals experiencing poverty were at the table was by including bill language that mandated the appointment of individuals experiencing poverty to the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty. This language was a good way to be intentional about providing meaningful engagement for individuals impacted by poverty but it has been incredibly difficult to sustain engagement of those appointed members.

Impacted members, like the rest of us, often face new life challenges that make continued engagement difficult and, for individuals unfamiliar with the slow nature of policy change, remaining engaged in the Commission's work can be challenging. In hindsight, incorporating more flexibility for the removal and appointment of Commissioners would help ensure sustained engagement. Likewise, appointing individuals that have a strong existing connection a community-based organization or other nonprofit may help sustain engagement, particularly individuals that have a more formal relationship with an organization that is a Campaign stakeholder.

Provide Resources to Make Participation in Hearings and Meetings Less of a Burden.

Providing interpreting services, child care, transportation reimbursement, and food at public hearings and community forums is one strategy that has worked to ensure that people impacted by poverty are able to participate and are encouraged to do so without undue hardship.

Create Other Less Time-Intensive Avenues of Participation Such as Recorded Personal Stories. We have found that using video and audio interviews with individuals experiencing poverty helps bring stories to life, humanizes data and policy proposals, and creates a tool that can live on beyond its initial intended use. A link to a video or an audio segment of an interview is something that Campaign partners can circulate to their networks, post on their website, and use as an advocacy tool to help support their work along with the work of the Campaign.

Heartland Alliance has incorporated the use of stories of people experiencing poverty in our advocacy work in a variety of ways. We use quotes or tangible examples when talking with legislators about a particular issue and in reports or other written materials. We also use videos in presentations, at events, or on the Campaign website or blog. One example of a series of interviews that we edited and used as an advocacy tool and a call to action related to state budget cuts to community mental health services can be viewed on Heartland Alliance's [YouTube](#) channel. More recently, the Campaign has collected stories to continue to bring a face to the issue of poverty. One recent example is the clips of testimony from the Poverty Commission's public hearings that are embedded into the Commission's 2012 Annual Report. Here are just a few examples: [Jennifer's testimony](#), [Shelly's testimony](#), and [Rodney's testimony](#).

Another example is the audio interviews embedded into [Illinois's 33%: Report on Illinois Poverty](#), the latest Heartland Alliance annual report on poverty, and the [videos](#) posted to the web of interviews with other "[witnesses to poverty](#)." One individual who was interviewed for the report and whose [interview](#) was used to promote the report's release, sent a thank you to Heartland Alliance staff that expressed what the opportunity meant to him. It read,

"I'm glad that you could use some of what I had to say. It's a big deal to us when someone hears what we say. Most times we think no one

cares when we are down and out. I am glad that my situation has improved and that I can look forward to getting better in the future as I work toward more stability. I still think that the difficulties were challenges not obstacles. Again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak out.”

Having a State Sanctioned Body, the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty, Can Be an Effective Tool to Support Change, but It Takes Considerable Nurturing

Establishing the Commission by statute has formalized it and has in essence developed a state sanctioned body comprised of legislators, state agency leaders, advocates, and services providers through which the Campaign can work to advance its policy agenda. It took significant time and work to establish the Commission as well as to staff it. Key activities to do so currently include:

Provide Consistent Staffing to the Commission. Many commissions and task force are unfunded and have no formal staff. The Commission is no exception. In order to ensure the work moves forward, Heartland Alliance and the Governor’s office have provided significant staff support for the Commission to ensure that its work advances in a timely and productive way. This work includes:

- Preparing draft agendas for Commission meetings and leading steering committee calls to develop those agendas,
- Planning Commission hearings and events and working to ensure adequate attendance by Commissioners,
- Providing drafting support for annual reports and other materials,
- scheduling and facilitating meetings of Commission workgroups,
- Ensuring that the Poverty Commission has adequate information to develop its legislative agenda,
- Ensuring that the Poverty Commission has weighed in on the specific legislative matters as it had intended, and
- Providing general administrative support.

Identify Ways to Counter Commission Fatigue. Nearly a quarter of Illinois’ more than 300 boards and commissions have been inactive in recent years, according to a 2011 audit. The creation of a commission or board or taskforce has become an easy way for lawmakers to say they are doing something about an issue without really doing anything substantive at all. Despite the fact that there is some commission fatigue in Illinois, the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty seems to have set itself apart for a number of reasons. The legislated structure of the Commission provides a level of accountability that many other Commissions

do not have. The Commission is mandated to comment on state matters that positively or negatively impact the goal of cutting extreme poverty in half and must release an Annual Report by September of each year. In addition, the Commission is required to organize at least one public hearing in conjunction with the Annual Report's release. Heartland Alliance and the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign leadership were instrumental in conceptualizing and ensuring that these requirements were a part of the Poverty Commission's enabling statute. There continue to be numerous Campaign supporters and other stakeholders who are not only interested in supporting the work of the Commission but are also eager to hold the state accountable to the goal of cutting extreme poverty in Illinois. The public hearing and report structure of the Commission helps keep the Commission engaged and the annual report helps provide a tool to hold decision-makers accountable on their yearly progress (or lack thereof) in reducing extreme poverty.

Create a Legislative or Policy Subcommittee Specifically Charged with Policy Change. The enacting legislation for the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty definitively framed the work of the Commission as human rights work. As the Legislative Subcommittee meets and evaluates policy proposals being moved in the state legislature, the human rights frame has offered an important guide and touchstone on decisions about how to weigh in on legislation that is not explicitly supported in the Poverty Elimination Strategy developed by the Commission. For example, when members of the Commission's legislative working group were trying to decide whether they should oppose a bill that would have prohibited SNAP recipients from using food stamps to purchase sugar sweetened beverage, the group considered the charge of the Commission and referred to human rights principles to help guide their ultimate decision. Commissioners ended up deciding to include the bill on their legislative watch list with other bills that they would oppose because this type of ban creates a double standard for people who are experiencing poverty, perpetuates inequality, and in no way affirms the dignity of those individuals who rely on food stamps to feed themselves and their families.

REFLECTIONS FROM CAMPAIGN LEADERS

DOUG SCHENKELBERG

Former From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign Coordinator and
Director, Advocacy & Outreach – Greater Chicago Food Depository

Thoughts on the Human Rights Frame

Where It Was Effective.

Utilizing the human rights frame to address poverty was effective in a couple different ways. The language of human rights – shifting the conversation from charity to freedom – helped shift the basis of the conversation. Interested individuals saw a new way of talking about the impact of poverty on individuals and the role of systems change in their lives. It brought a new energy to an issue that can easily get stuck in old arguments. Further, for those experiencing poverty, the human rights frame in and of itself provides a measure of dignity that society often denies them.

Separately, the mechanisms of human rights were very useful tools. For example, one of the underlying premises of human rights is that all rights - economic, social, cultural, political, and civil - are dependent on each other. This concept helped bring together organizations that came at the issue of poverty from different angles and create a safe space where everyone understood that no one issue trumps another. Furthermore, the concept of progressive realization of rights was incredibly useful in grounding the ideals of human rights in the pragmatic realities of systems change. This one concept helped tremendously when discussing the human rights framework and dispelling assumptions about human rights as a conceptual framework divorced from reality.

Where It Was Not Effective.

At the end of the day, the proof of the effectiveness of the human rights framework is whether systems change occurred that would not have happened but for the engagement of that framework. Outside of the difficulty of controlling for other variables, it is difficult to say that the framework was the driver of change. I do not believe that any decision maker changed their mind or became a stronger champion because of the human rights frame. That being said, as already noted, I do believe that some advocates were engaged in a way they would not have been because of the human rights frame.

Ultimately, the difficulty of using the framework lies in the fact that we do not have a legal framework that recognizes the validity of economic, social, and cultural rights. Without that fundamental structural change, it can serve as a strong rhetorical device, but does not have the authority to force action.

REV. DR. SID L. MOHN

Poverty Commission Co-Chair and
President of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights

Freedom from poverty is a human right. This simple notion can change opinions, bring together people from different interests and differing backgrounds, and guide a social justice agenda that is based on dignity and respect for all people.

When the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign was formed, and later the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty, we were able to move the human rights frame to the center of a state-wide conversation about poverty. Rooting an anti-poverty agenda in human rights brought together a diverse group of organizations and advocates that self-defined their work as social justice work toward a common goal. The work of our partners became our own – and our work, in turn, became the work of our partners. The guiding principle that freedom from poverty is a human right and the intentional use of the human rights framework revitalized our work and the work of our partners to form a more contemporary, inclusive anti-poverty agenda.

In addition to bringing Illinois advocates and organizations together, the human rights framework connected us to a worldwide community of human rights workers working eliminate extreme poverty. A comprehensive UN development agenda and the Millennium Development Goals set time-bound targets by which to make progress towards the goal of eliminating extreme poverty and realizing human rights and set a path for the world's efforts to alleviate extreme poverty. The UN's ambitious but attainable goal inspired the Campaign and helped link Illinois advocates to the international human rights community.

Using the human rights framework as a guide helps ensure that every next step that we take – as advocates, leaders, organizations, or individuals - is grounded in our values: everyone has the right to food, clothing, housing, health care, justice, and dignity.

EITHNE MCMENAMIN

Poverty Commission Member and
Associate Director for City Affairs, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless

For me, using the human rights frame in anti-poverty advocacy is both challenging and helpful. It is challenging because it's not the most common or well understood language for us as a society. Societally, we tend to limit our understanding of rights to a civil rights frame, rather than the more broad human rights frame in our thinking and communications about what people are entitled to. This, of course, has to do in part with our society's focus on individuals in pursuit of their highest potential (e.g., equality before the law and freedom from discrimination based on our individual characteristics).

Using the human rights frame challenges us to think more broadly about what we are entitled to by virtue of our humanity (e.g., the right to work, social security, education). I think any education process is necessarily a long one. Using the human rights frame in our work has been an education process- both for ourselves and the people we enlist in our work. Personally, I have found the frame helpful in thinking about issues in a more broad and interconnected way. It has been a good challenge for me to learn to articulate this way of framing rights.

I think discussing the human rights frame is most effective when we have opportunities to have more in-depth, wide-ranging conversations with people about human rights and how they relate to our anti-poverty work. Often in our day-to-day work advocating on specific policy proposals to elected officials it's harder to incorporate human rights language. Usually when we talk with legislators we are pressed for time and generally frame our arguments around why supporting anti-poverty legislation makes sense from an economic standpoint. While these ways of framing our work aren't incompatible, when having short, to-the-point conversations I tend to stick to the economic arguments. Fortunately, we have several legislators who are on the Poverty Commission and who have been involved with the Campaign, so they are being trained in using the human rights framework as well.

I think one of the strengths of the Campaign is that we look at all of the legislative proposals that we're advocating for as being progressive and interconnected. In the same way that human rights are interdependent and interconnected, so too is the practical, evidence-based anti-poverty agenda that we are working towards enacting. While everyone who is engaged in the Campaign works for independent organizations that all have their own focus and agendas, it is vitally important to have an overarching effort that we can all get behind and work on together. The From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign is that effort. Fighting for our own separate agendas that may or may not overlap is sometimes necessary. But when we can lift up a vision of people's lives that is based on fundamental, inalienable, human rights, show how they are connected and should not be put in competition with one another, it makes the work we all do stronger and more effective.

CONCLUSION

Currently, at both the national and state levels, we rely on a patchwork of inadequately funded programs to address poverty. These programs fail to look comprehensively at core causes of poverty, let alone provide adequately resourced solutions. One reason for the ineffectiveness of this approach is that we address poverty piecemeal and as an afterthought - much of the resources put into alleviating poverty are discretionary and money is only spent on these programs after “core obligations” are addressed.

The human rights framework allows us to take a step back and look at the solutions to extreme poverty in a new way. When we recognize our history as a nation that believes everyone should have an opportunity to work, to provide for his or her family, and to engage in society, how we prioritize our resources changes. We again recognize our obligation to address the needs of the most marginalized and place a high priority on crafting the solutions to extreme poverty. We recommit ourselves to establishing a comprehensive vision and a workable plan that supports that vision. The From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign has been a critical component to facilitating this paradigm shift in Illinois. It is our hope that these lessons learned can help fuel other initiatives across the United States seeking social change. We need to think about our freedoms in new inventive ways, have conversations across interest areas, and use our collective knowledge to press for real opportunity. The human rights framework helps unify us to achieve these goals.

The **human rights framework** allows us to take a step back and look at the solutions to extreme poverty in a new way. When we recognize our history as a nation that believes everyone should have an opportunity to work, to provide for his or her family, and to engage in society, how we prioritize our resources changes.

HEARTLAND ALLIANCE

ENDING POVERTY

Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights

Policy & Advocacy

33 W. Grand Avenue, Suite 500

Chicago, IL 60654

advocacy@heartlandalliance.org

www.heartlandalliance.org