Listening Sessions:
Helping the Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building Understand and Address Poverty

The health of our social and personal being lies in the immediate contact with other humans.
-Perakyla, 2005

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DISCLAIMER

The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, by the University of Virginia, or by any other agency.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approximately 25.4 percent, or 58,471 people, in the City of Richmond live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). In FY15, the Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building (OCWB) was established with the overall goal of reducing poverty by 40 percent and child poverty by 50 percent in Richmond by 2030 (Office of Community Wealth Building, 2016). In order to address these goals, the OCWB was designed to take a holistic approach to poverty relief and wealth building. As part of this holistic approach, the OCWB has started a community engagement initiative called "listening sessions."

Listening sessions are supposed to serve as a means to communicate with stakeholders. However, they currently lack a comprehensive strategy to address the needs of those living in poverty in the City of Richmond.

In this report, I provide best practices for listening sessions as discussed in the literature, several alternative models for listening sessions, and a final recommendation. I propose the following alternatives:

1. Establish a Focus Group Model for Listening Sessions
2. Utilize Strategic Planning to Enable Listening Sessions to Create Change
3. Create a Logic Model to Help Organize and Evaluate Listening Sessions
4. Adopt a Customer Satisfaction Model for Listening Sessions

I evaluated each of the above alternatives based on six established criteria: (1) Effectiveness, (2) Administrative Burden, (3) Total Monetary Cost, (4) Implementation Burden, (5) Measurability, and (6) Sustainability. I quantified the estimated costs of each alternative and provided qualitative estimates for the remaining five criteria. Based on my analysis and comprehensive comparison of each alternative, I recommend that the Office of Community Wealth Building **adopt a customer satisfaction model in order to build trust and social capital to help those in poverty (Alternative 4).**

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Approximately 25.4 percent, or 58,471 people, in the City of Richmond live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Moreover, those who are born into poverty in Richmond are more likely to stay in poverty. The Equality of Opportunity Project at Harvard found that the City of Richmond was among the lowest 2 percent of all counties in the United States – 48th out of 2,478 – in fostering absolute upward mobility (Office of Community Wealth Building, 2016).[1]

As a step towards eliminating poverty in the City of Richmond, former Mayor Dwight Jones provided $3.4 million in FY 2015 towards a "comprehensive poverty reduction initiative," which would include workforce and economic development, housing, education, and transportation (Office of Community Wealth Building, 2016). Included in Mayor Jones' initiative was the establishment of the Mayor's Office of Community Wealth Building (OCWB), which has the overall goal of reducing poverty by 40 percent and child poverty by 50 percent in Richmond by 2030 (Department of Community Wealth Building, 2016).

As OCWB was designed to foster a holistic approach to poverty reduction, the current Director, Reggie Gordon, has started weekly "listening sessions" as a way to connect with the Richmond community and "close a gap in the feedback loop with stakeholders" (Personal Communications, 2018). Director Gordon also hopes that the listening sessions will provide the opportunity to incorporate a variety of perspectives and inform OCWB's strategy. As such, these listening sessions are considered a key part in OCWB's overall strategy to reduce poverty in Richmond (Personal Communications, 2018).

However, since the start of the listening sessions in 2016, OCWB has not designed a comprehensive short or long-term strategy for the sessions. Meetings are held and notes are taken, but then nothing is done with the potentially valuable qualitative data that is collected. Not to mention, it appears from conversations with community members in Richmond that there is a lack of trust between the community and government decisionmakers. Thus, low-income residents, a key stakeholder, rarely participate in OWCB's listening sessions. *A latent opportunity exists to develop a comprehensive and strategic design for OCWB's listening sessions and establish concrete data analysis methods.*

[1] Absolute upward mobility is defined as the fraction of children earning more than their parents.

BACKGROUND: OFFICE OF COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

The OCWB was established in 2015 to lead Richmond's poverty reduction initiative. The mission of OCWB is as follows:

The mission of the Office of Community Wealth Building is three fold: create a system that makes it easier for everyone to build wealth; facilitate pathways to build wealth in order to change the way people live and create a hopeful future for their children; construct an economic environment where families have a living wage that provides the ability to earn, save, and meet unexpected challenges we all face in life (City of Richmond, 2018).

According to the OCWB's 2018 Annual Report, the Office has five key policy priorities: (1) workforce development, (2) job creation, (3) education, (4) development of a regional transportation system, and (5) redevelopment of one or more public housing communities. The OCWB is considered a "significant civic innovation within City government designed to foster a more holistic, comprehensive approach to poverty reduction" (OCWB Annual Report, 2018).

The City of Richmond has three long-term goals for its poverty reduction initiative:

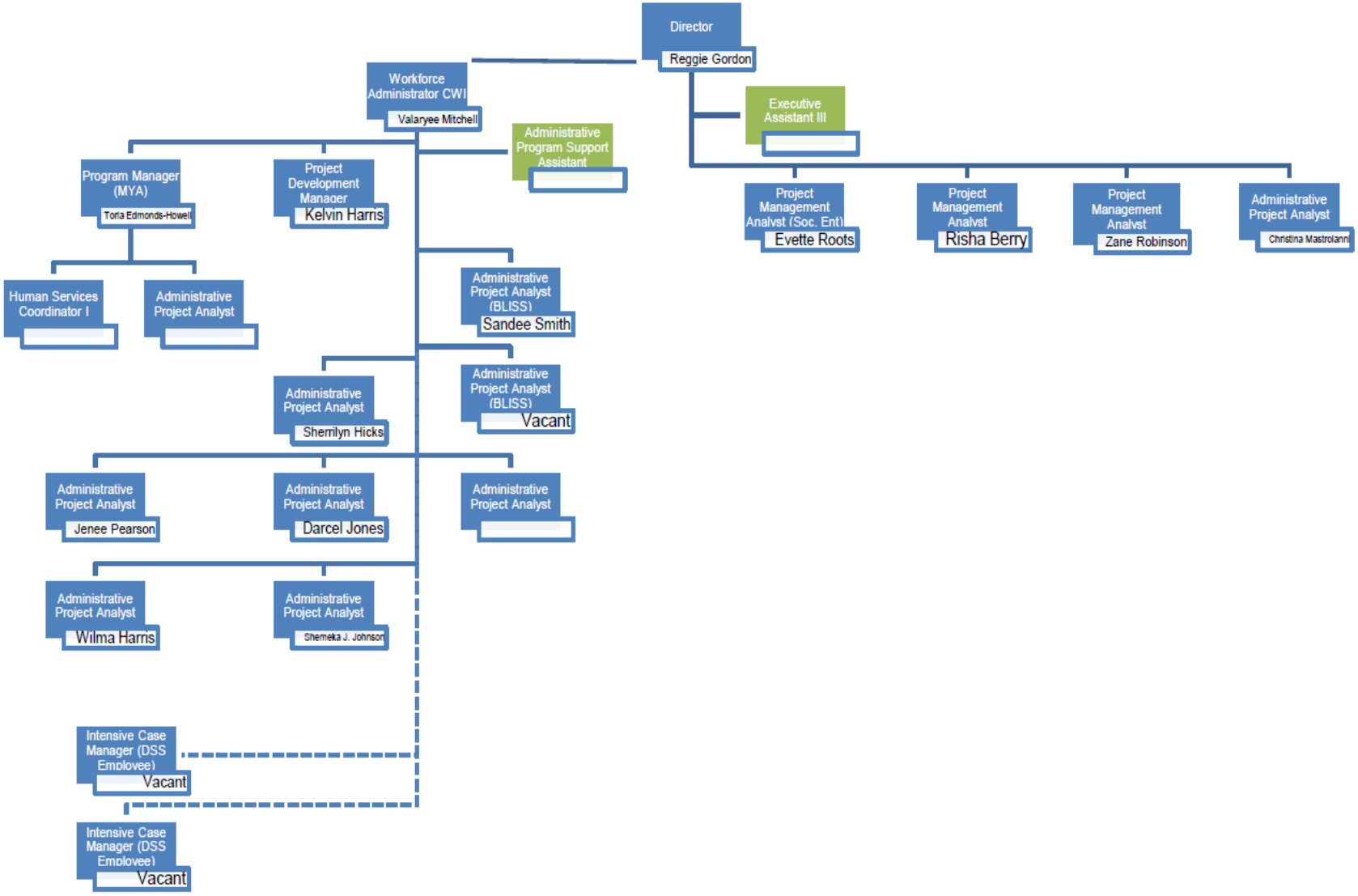
1. Reduce the total number of residents in poverty (apart from college students) by 40 percent by 2030 (relative to 2014 baseline)
2. Reduce the number of children in the City living in poverty by 50 percent by 2030 (relative to 2014 baseline)
3. Reduce the City's overall poverty rate by 15 percent or less by 2030 (OCWB Annual Report, 2018).

Since OCWB's creation in 2015, they have focused on measuring and analyzing poverty. According to their 2018 Annual Report, however, the OCWB will begin to shift focus to wealth building – or "strategies that are tactically crafted to identify systemic barriers that block access to wealth and upward mobility" (OCWB Annual Report, 2018). Specifically, OCWB will focus on nine economic domains: (1) employment stability, (2) income, (3) mobility, (4) childcare, (5) housing, (6) quality of life, (7) food, (8) legal, and (9) recovery (OCWB Annual Report, 2018). The OCWB has also adopted the Living Wage Model, which considers the costs associated with childcare, health care, and geographic variation in essential household expenses. Such costs decrease income and can also influence someone's ability to work and move out of poverty.

The OCWB primarily helps Richmonders in poverty who are: (1) unemployed (either for 15-27 weeks or longer); (2) marginally attached to the workforce (neither working or looking for employment, but desires employment); (3) discouraged workers (those who believe no jobs are available for them or have complex family responsibilities); and, (4) involuntary part-time workers (OCWB Annual Report, 2018). The OCWB utilizes Community Wealth Building (CWB) career stations in Richmond to assist those searching for employment. CWBs typically assist with job searches, applications, offer direct staff support, and training. Last year, 1,841 participants attended trainings, 350 participants were served, and 155 were hired with an average wage of $10.42 (OCWB Annual Report, 2018).

Additionally, the OCWB encourages partnerships with other local organizations, such as the Virginia Commonwealth University, United Way of Greater Richmond, ChamberRVA, and other City departments. The OCWB also works to expand its community engagement efforts through listening sessions, Community Wealth Building Ambassadors (those who work to promote the CWB agenda in the community), a Citizen's Advisory Board, and City-Wide Focus Groups (utilizing other City departments) (OCWB Annual Report, 2018). The OCWB has 14 full-time staffers (see OCWB organization chart below) and $2.1 million dollars in its FY18 budget, most of which is utilized to pay salaries and benefits. The OCWB gets a considerable amount of funding for poverty reduction initiates from grants. For example, OCWB received a $1.9 million grant to expand workforce development services to City residents for FY18.

Office of Community Wealth Building – FY19

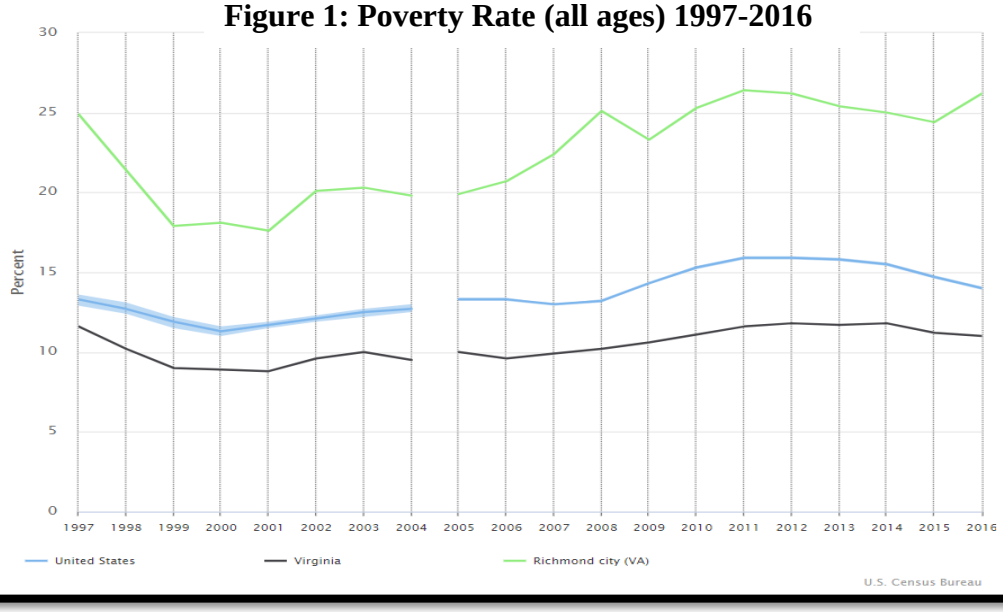


HISTORY OF POVERTY IN THE CITY OF RICHMOND

According to Hayter (2015), the City of Richmond has historically experienced a high rate of poverty. Between 2006 and 2010, the City of Richmond's poverty rate was approximately 25.3 percent (approximately 5.0 percent for whites, 30.0 percent for African Americans, and 38.4 percent for Latinos). The unemployment rate in the City during the same time period was 5.1 percent for whites, 14.1 percent for African Americans, and 16.1 percent for Latinos (Hayter, 2015). Furthermore, the Mayor's Anti-Poverty Commission found in 2013 that approximately "eighteen of sixty-six neighborhoods in the city have a poverty rate exceeding 35 percent, including six neighborhoods with a poverty rate exceeding 50 percent. Over 51 percent of the city's poverty population (nearly 25,000 people) reside[s] in these high-poverty neighborhoods" (Report to Mayor Jones, 2013).

Today, the narrative is not much different. In 2016 the U.S. and Virginia poverty rates were 12.7 percent and 11.2 percent, respectively. The poverty rate for the City of Richmond in 2016 was 25.4 percent, which is double the national average and 14.2 percentage points higher than the average in Virginia (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). As you can see in *Figure 1*, the poverty rate for the City of Richmond has historically been higher than the overall rate in Virginia and the United States. Furthermore, *Table A* shows the overall poverty rate in Richmond, including and excluding

Figure 1: Poverty Rate (all ages) 1997-2016



undergraduates, and the child poverty rate from 1959 to 2015.[2] This further demonstrates that the overall level of poverty in Richmond has not significantly changed since 1959.

Furthermore, the City of Richmond also has a higher poverty rate than the other large cities and counties in Virginia (based on population), as seen in *Figure 2* (page 14). However, even though progress has been made through the use of public and private initiatives to revive historic neighborhoods, provide assistance to the homeless and hungry, and address some aspects of economic marginalization, the City has yet to find an approach to foster upward mobility and reduce the overall poverty rate.

Table A. Poverty and Child Poverty in the City of Richmond, 1959-2015

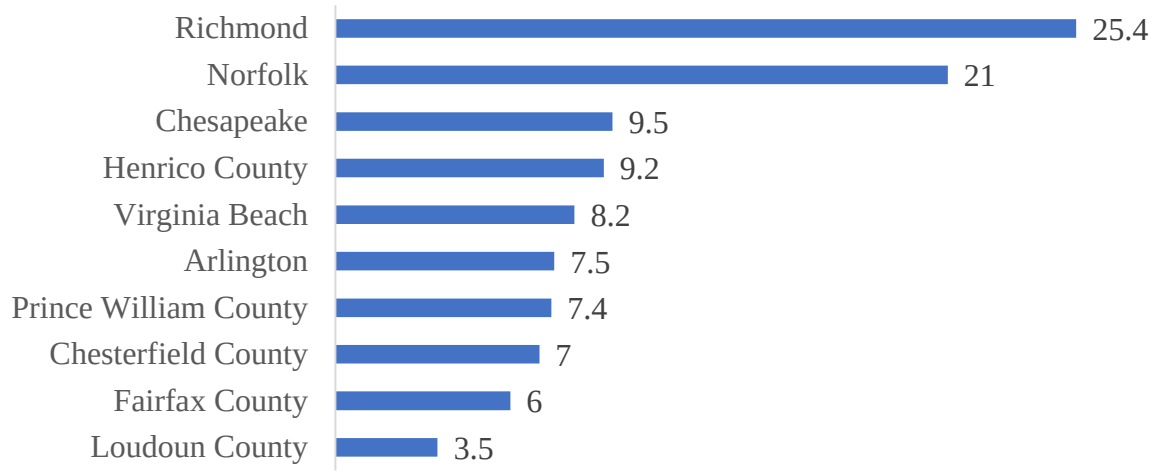
	Poverty Rate	Excluding Undergraduates	Child Poverty
1959	28.9% (60,501)	N/A	N/A
1969	18.0% (43,355)	N/A	N/A
1979	19.3% (40,228)	N/A	N/A
1989	20.9% (40,103)	N/A	N/A
1999	21.4% (40,185)	N/A	33.4% (14,040)
2005-09	22.1% (42,208)	N/A	35.2% (14,212)
2006-10	25.3% (48,452)	22.7% (39,916)	38.7% (14,952)
2007-11	26.3% (50,825)	23.8% (42,009)	,517)
2008-12	26.7% (52,260)	24.3% (43,508)	40.4% (15,548)
2009-13	25.6% (50,681)	23.1% (41,988)	38.8% (14,730)
2010-14	25.5% (51,295)	23.4% (43,371)	39.5% (15,101)
2011-15	25.5% (51,828)	23.7% (44,739)	40.0% (15,303)
2012-16	25.4% (52,470)	23.6% (45,362)	40.5% (15,604)
--African-American	33.8% (34,394)		54.8% (12,778)
--Hispanic (any race)	30.6% (3,923)		38.4% (1,560)
--Non-Hispanic White	13.7% (11,233)		4.9% (432)

Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2016, Table S-1701, Tables B-17001B, B-17001H, B-17001I.

**Table A borrowed from the OCWB 2018 Annual Report.*

[2] Between 1969 and 1979, the City of Richmond experienced a decrease in poverty rates. However, the poverty rate began to rise again in 1989.

Figure 2: 2016 Poverty Rates for Virginia's Largest Localities



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016

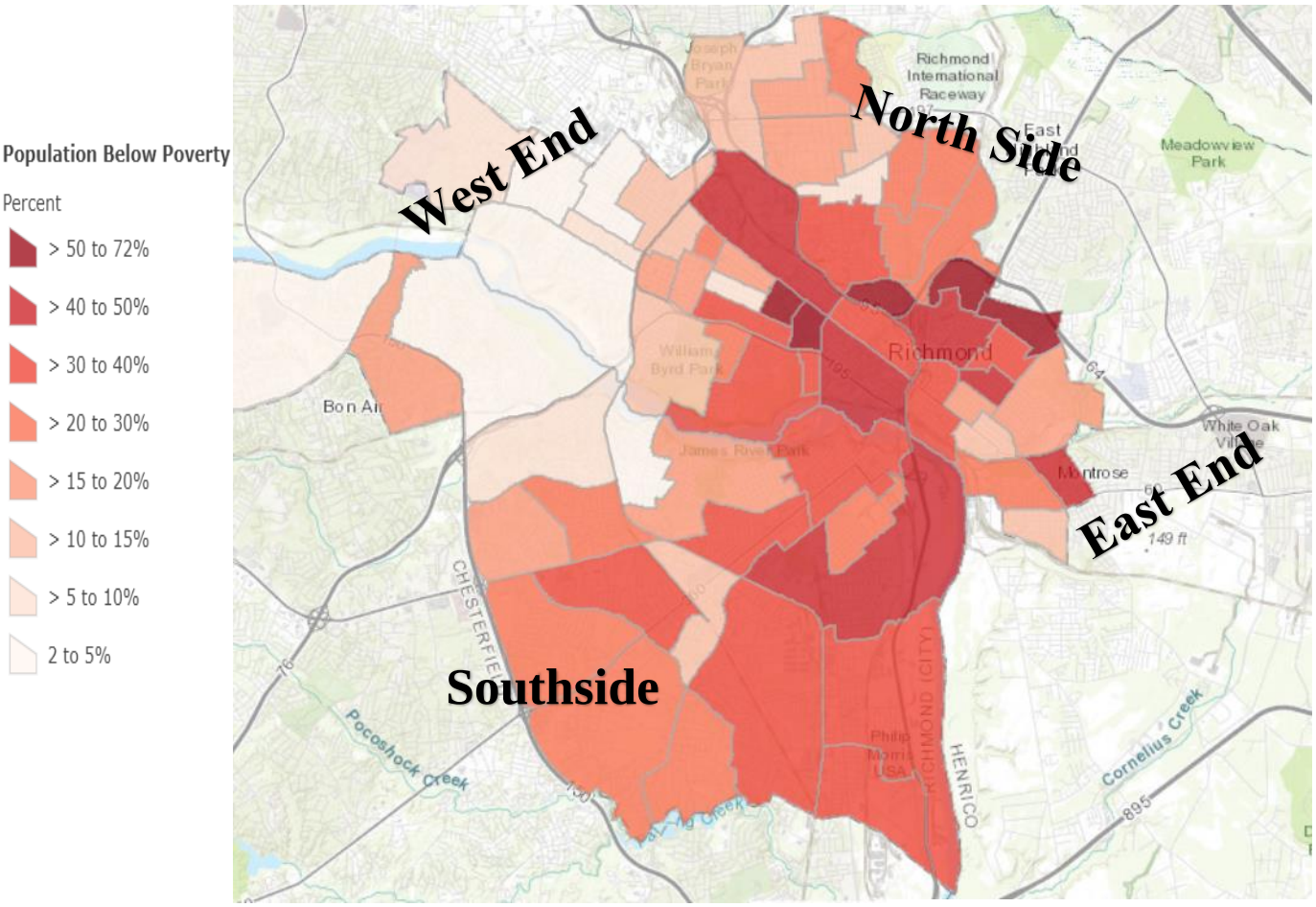
As you can also tell in *Figure 3* (page 15), poverty in concentrated into certain neighborhoods in Richmond. According to Griego (2014), "The East End of Richmond, while gentrifying in spots, holds most of the city's public housing projects. This is concentrated poverty, the poverty born of segregation and disinvestment, that city government not all that long ago helped to create and is now seeking to undo in the name of creating opportunity where little now exists." Some areas in the East End have neighborhoods where 72 percent of residents live below the poverty line. In that same neighborhood, almost 97 percent of residents are African American (Richmond Assessor's Office, 2016).

Why Addressing Poverty Matters

As more than 58,000 people in Richmond live in poverty, it is crucial that policymakers address this issue in a strategic manner. These 58,000 people are struggling to fulfil the most basic needs, including access to food, shelter, and health care. Not to mention, inequality is detrimental to economic growth and exacerbates political and social tensions and a lack of trust. Policymakers, such as those at OCWB, can help create an enabling environment to generate productive employment, education, and housing opportunities for the poor. Additionally, policymakers can

formulate strategies and policies that stimulate upward mobility and reduce poverty. However, in order to do this, the literature and social policy experts have found that community members must be involved and trust must exist for policy interventions to be effective and significant.

Figure 3: GIS Map of Richmond Population Below Poverty Line



Source: Richmond Assessor's Office, 2016

As poverty is such a complex problem in Richmond, the OCWB has decided to take a holistic approach to poverty relief through their listening sessions. The following section analyzes relevant literature to better understand best practices for listening sessions. This literature review will serve as a point of reference for the remainder of this report.

LITERATURE REVIEW: LISTENING SESSIONS

Listening Sessions as Policymaking Tools

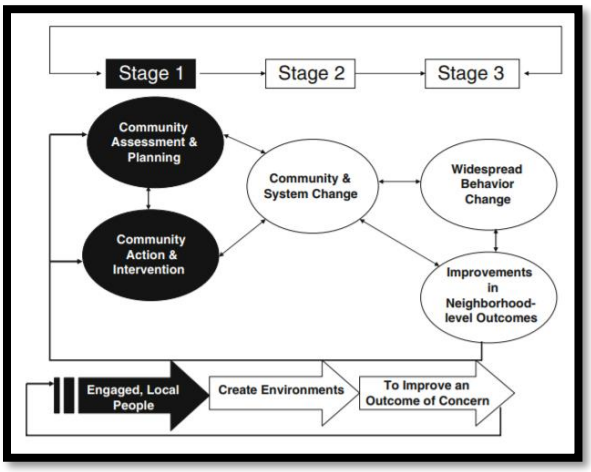
As Putnam (2000) concluded in *Bowling Alone*, modern life does not leave much time for joining together as a community – on any level. "Listening sessions" are one means of bringing communities together to solve local problems. While the concept of a "listening session" as a policymaking tool has become more common, especially on the local level, peer-reviewed academic literature on this topic is difficult to find. Additionally, the language and methodologies for utilizing listening sessions varies. For example, even though the OCWB uses the term "listening session," other commonly used terms are "community conversations," "community engagement," or "collaborative partnerships," all of which have a similar goal, but take a slightly different approach to this policymaking tool. For the purposes of this paper, the following definition of a listening session will be utilized: *discussions among local people and organizations from multiple sectors, such as local government, non-profits, and community members, working together to create action plans to improve conditions and outcomes and the overall well-being of the community.* This definition is derived from studies completed by Campbell, et al. (2013) and Roussos and Fawcett (2000).

General Design of Listening Sessions

According to Roussos and Fawcett (2000), across the available literature on listening sessions, such conversations are often the product of hybrid strategies, including community organizing, policy advocacy, and social planning. As such, listening sessions may require both top-down and bottom-up approaches (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000). Moreover, there are several key assumptions about listening sessions: (1) the goal cannot be reached by any one individual or group alone; (2) participants should be diverse in interest and experience; (3) shared interests will create room for consensus (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000). In addition to these assumptions, listening sessions need to be organized, strategic, and follow a logical sequence. *Figure 4* outlines the process that Watson-

Thompson et al. (2008) found most helpful in their work with urban communities, which they adopted from Boothroyd et al. (2004). Even though this design is simplistic, it is easily transferable to other communities and provides a clear guide to implementing a listening session within a community. Additionally, the non-rigid stages presented in *Figure 4* allow for flexibility in design to fit the specific needs of a given community.

Figure 4- Framework for Community Planning, Action, and Change



Source: Watson-Thompson, 2008

Listening Sessions in Practice

As rudimentary as the act of "listening" might seem, it provides the building blocks for trust in a community and encourages grassroots participation, networks, and problem-solving, otherwise known as social capital (McElmurry et. al.,1990). Listening sessions have also been found to encourage the exchange of cultural capital, an implicit resource that can contribute much needed context to difficult community problems (Bourdieu, 1986). In some cases, local reporters also attended the listening sessions, which resulted in in-depth stories that helped to bring awareness to the specific community problem (Trainor et al., 2012).

Listening sessions have been used to successfully address a wide variety of problems, including: mental health stigma among ethnic minorities in Scotland; improving early childhood educational alignment; and, efforts to determine health issues and better meet health needs among rural populations, such as Native Americans in North Dakota and elderly Cambodian refugees in Massachusetts (Campbell, et al., 2013). The success of these programs was evaluated through follow-up surveys.[3] Other localities have also started different approaches to listening sessions, including Alameda County in California. The Alameda County government started listening sessions to understand poverty and then developed a grant program for non-profits to address various problems that were discovered during the listening sessions (Alameda County Listening

[3] Even though follow-up surveys are popular in qualitative research, it should be noted that they are typically administered electronically, and there is room for concern over the richness of the data.

Session Report, 2016). However, the effectiveness of this approach in Alameda County has not yet been evaluated.

However, Alameda County is not alone in their lack of measurement. According to Berkowitz (2001); Butterfoss et al. (1993); Kreuter et al. (2000); Roussos and Fawcett (2000); and, Zakocs (2006), despite increased usage of listening sessions, there is little systematic measurement of effectiveness in communities. Moreover, listening sessions are not without their challenges. One significant challenge has been finding a way to include those who experience the problem the most, often minority or low-income people, in community-organizing efforts and decisions regarding policy changes. It can also be challenging to collaborate with community leaders in sectors outside of the lead organization. If the organizations involved in the listening sessions do not effectively communicate, then the entire operation can fall apart. Lastly, maintaining continuity of leadership and resources long enough to make a difference is often a challenge – especially if the initiative is led by a government institution (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000).

However, if listening sessions are strategically implemented, they can provide a low-investment, high-yield endeavor that brings people together. Roussos and Fawcett (2000) also concluded that community participation in decisions about intervention components and their implementation reduced the likelihood of conflict among decisionmakers and improved the implementation process. Lastly, listening sessions do not typically cost as much as other policy initiatives as they use existing resources for community organizing.

Qualitative Analysis: A Tool for Effective Listening Sessions

Utilizing listening sessions as a policymaking tool requires knowledge of qualitative analysis methods – otherwise, the effort is largely meaningless and moves forward without strategic design or proper analysis. In the most general sense, qualitative research is the study of social phenomena. It is interpretative and focuses on context, involves the researcher, and requires systematic inquiry (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research "consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world…qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them." The most

popular qualitative methods include: observation, in-depth one-on-one interviews, focus groups, narratives, and analysis of documents (e.g. coding).

Below are two qualitative research designs that OCWB could draw from to conduct listening sessions. These two designs were selected as they are the most administratively feasible for the OCWB to implement into their listening session framework as they are both relatively inexpensive and require limited personnel. Additionally, these designs fit into the definition of a listening session.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are typically composed of 7-10 people who are unfamiliar with each other but share certain characteristics that are relevant to the research question(s). There is an interviewer who asks specific questions and a research aid who takes detailed notes and observes the emotions of the participants. The overall goal of conducting focus groups is to create a supportive environment that allows freedom of expression by the participants (Marshall and Rossman, 2016).

One strength of focus groups is that they can be helpful for "gaining access, focusing site selection and sampling, and even for checking tentative conclusions" (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). Furthermore, focus group results have high face validity as the method is easily understood by many. Lastly, the cost of focus groups is relatively low, you receive quick results, and can easily increase your sample size by adding more people (Kruger and Casey, 2008).

However, there are challenges to conducting focus groups as well. For example, power dynamics can be problematic in the focus-group setting. The interviewer must be highly trained to facilitate tough discussions and work around power dynamics to allow freedom of thought and expression and collect good-quality data. Secondly, the interviewer has less control over a group than in a one-on-one interview, which can result in wasted time (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). Lastly, the interviewer must decide whether to videotape the session. If the session is taped, then protecting the privacy and identity of the participants is crucial.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research (PAR) "draws on the precept of emancipation, as articulated by Freire (1970), that sustainable empowerment and development must begin with the concerns of the marginalized" (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). In other words, PAR makes a commitment to action by involving those in need (or the stakeholders) to address a societal problem (such as poverty). Additionally, PAR involves the researcher and stakeholders collaborating on a task. Through the use of researcher analysis expertise and unique political perspectives and stakeholder "on the ground" expertise, the group creates an action plan to address a problem (McIntyre, 2008). As the researcher and the stakeholders work hand-in-hand, this helps to build trust and foster relationships and networks within the community.

Furthermore, the action plans produced by PAR can range from "changing public policy, to making recommendations to government agencies, to making informal changes in the community that benefit the people living there, to organizing a local event, to simply increasing awareness about an issue native to a particular locale" (McIntyre, 2008). The main strength of PAR is that it has a flexible design and both the researcher and stakeholders can take their time to develop a strategic action plan that fits a community's needs. Overall, PAR takes a strategic approach to address a community's specific issue, while also building trust and networks.

However, there are several challenges with PAR. Firstly, due to its collaborate approach, PAR can be a lengthy process and difficult to organize. Secondly, as the researcher is completely involved in the process, there are concerns about power dynamics and silencing marginalized individuals if the researcher is not highly trained. Lastly, there could be challenges with privacy and confidentiality when the researcher is heavily involved.

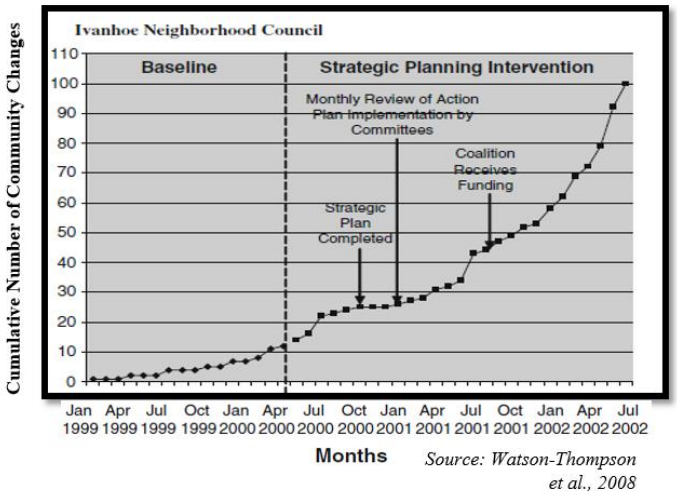
Method for Evaluation

Whereas using qualitative analysis to formulate strategic listening sessions has been found to be effective in various settings, one major flaw to this policymaking approach is that it is not always clear how to evaluate its effectiveness. Most studies mentioned in this report utilized post-listening session surveys to collect feedback on either the session itself or the resulting intervention. However, one potentially more effective evaluative technique was utilized by Watson-Thomson et al. in 2008. This study used a collaborative partnership to create a strategic plan for community

change within two neighborhoods in Kansas City. They then used an interrupted time-series design to compare two baselines (pre-intervention level) across neighborhoods to examine the effects of actions taken post-listening session.

As shown in *Figure 5*, this design enabled the examination of rates of change (dependent variable) associated with the staggered implementation of strategic planning (independent variable) (Watson-Thomson et al., 2008). The interrupted time series design allows the researcher to evaluate the impact of the intervention by assessing the slope (rate of community change) pre- and post-intervention, over multiple observation points (Shadish et al., 2002).

Figure 5 – Rate of Community Change



Source: Watson-Thompson et al., 2008

This design enhances generalizability by allowing the effects of the intervention to be observed "with two intervention groups, at two different periods in history, and in two different settings" (Shadish et al., 2002).[4] The process of developing and later implementing the strategic plan appeared to be associated with an average increase in rates of community change (Watson-Thomson et al., 2008).

While this study did produce valuable results and a promising model for evaluating listening sessions, there are two main challenges associated with interrupted time-series designs. Firstly, they require an extended study period, which can be difficult for communities to implement. Secondly, as they involve comparing two neighborhoods, timing delays or changes in leadership can influence the longer-term effects (Shadish et al., 2002). However, this approach is more reliable than just using surveys alone to determine listening session effectiveness.

[4] Only one intervention group is depicted in *Figure 2*.

Implications for the City of Richmond

Through the review of literature on listening sessions and their impacts on communities, I have found that listening sessions can take many forms, which is a benefit to their design as communities can mold them to fit their unique needs. There are several assumptions about listening sessions that need to be kept in mind if they are being considered for a specific community: (1) the goal cannot be reached by any one individual or group alone; (2) participants should be diverse in experience; (3) shared interests will create room for consensus (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000). In addition to these assumptions, listening sessions need to be focused, strategic, and follow a logical sequence.

As such, in order to measure the effectiveness of listening sessions, it is crucial to ground their framework in qualitative analysis methods. If grounded in qualitative methods, listening sessions can: (1) serve as a relatively inexpensive and administratively feasible policymaking tool; (2) build trust within a community; (3) serve as a means of providing context to complicated policy problems; and, (4) act as a catalyst for community action. If the Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building wants to help those in poverty and have a meaningful impact on their community, they need to adopt some of the listening session practices and methods outlined in this literature review. As 25.4 percent of Richmonders live in poverty and have extreme difficulty moving themselves out of poverty, it is time for the OCWB to effectively and strategically get on the ground.

LISTENING SESSIONS: A NEW PURPOSE

According to the OCWB 2018 Annual Report, the concept of a "listening session" was established in 2016. The OCWB hosts listening sessions between 1:30-3:30pm on Fridays in their office suite on the 15th floor of the City Hall building in downtown Richmond. Anyone, including community members, NGO leaders, interest groups, or government officials, are welcome to schedule a meeting. Director Gordon has stated that the purpose of the listening sessions is twofold: (1) close the feedback look with stakeholders (individuals in poverty and those who work to help people in poverty); and, (2) inform OCWB's wealth building strategy. As such, Director Gordon leads the listening sessions and OCWB staff provide support and take notes. Besides staff time, no resources are dedicated to OCWB's listening sessions – there are no costs associated with the current model.

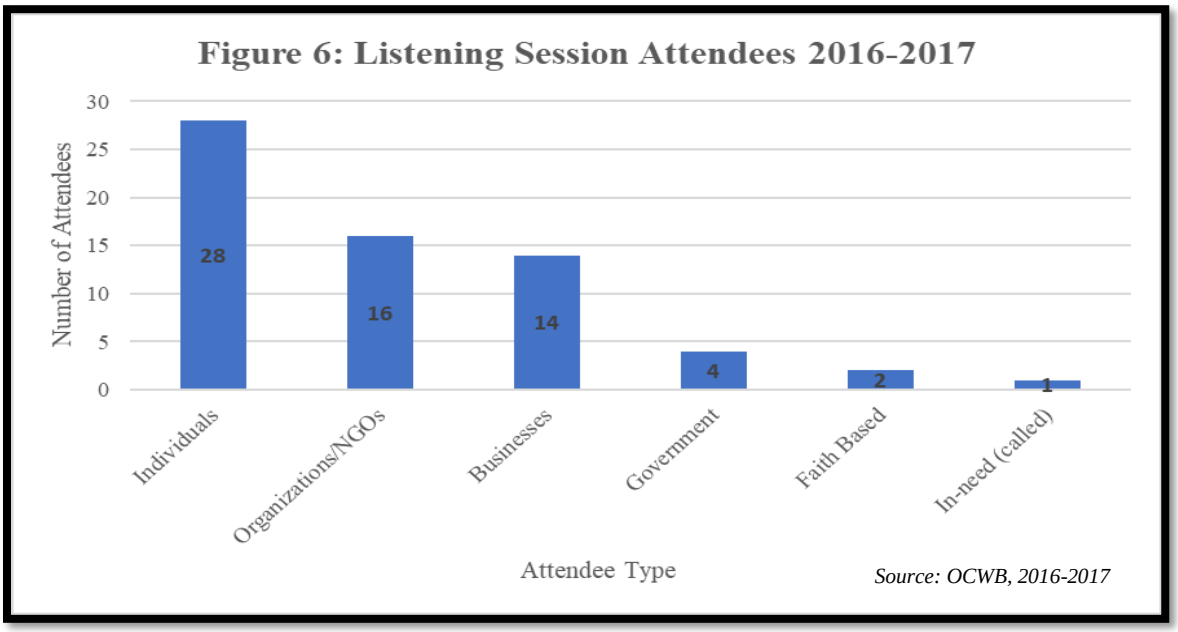
Listening sessions are an innovative concept, especially for a government office. However, the current model for OCWB's listening sessions does not provide the necessary structure for success. In other words, the overall goals are not aligned with the current approach. As explained in the literature, listening sessions need to be focused, goal driven, involve a diverse group of stakeholders, and have the ability to be measured. Currently, the OCWB's listening sessions lack focus, strategy, key stakeholders, and measurability. Moreover, listening sessions are currently held on the 15th floor of the City Hall building in Richmond, which the literature and experts have said is a barrier to access for low-income individuals who tend to distrust the government.

The above conclusions about the current listening session model are based on: (1) observations during a listening session on February 9, 2018; and, (2) my analysis of the 2016-2017 listening session notes for approximately 25 listening sessions. Below is a summary of the 2016-2017 listening session themes (*Table B*).

Table B: Listening Session Themes 2016-2017	
Themes	**Number of times theme appeared**
Education/training	12
Collaboration/partnership	10
Community engagement	7
Youth programs	7
Workforce development	6
Poverty	6
Job creation	5
Transportation	5
Substance abuse	5
Trust	3
Outreach	3
Housing/home ownership	3

Source: OCWB, 2016-2017

As seen in *Table B*, there were 12 different themes found in the 2016-2017 listening session notes. This is a problem because it shows that the listening sessions are not focused enough to make an impact or goal oriented. It was also found that the people and groups attending listening sessions were not those actually experiencing poverty (see *Figure 6*).



As displayed in *Figure 6*, meetings with those identified as "individuals" occurred 28 times. This number includes meetings with individuals interested in OCWB's mission or those with an idea for OCWB to pursue (e.g. collaborate with X). Listening sessions were also held with local NGOs, businesses, government agencies, and faith-based organizations. However, only one person in poverty called the office – they did not attend a listening session in-person. The data presented in *Figure 6* further shows that the OCWB is not targeting the central stakeholders, or those in poverty. Additionally, there is no analysis mechanism currently in place to measure the effectiveness or success of the listening sessions. Measurement is crucial for any policy related program to ensure that resources (such as staff time and program funding) are efficiently utilized.

To assist those in poverty, the OCWB needs to establish specific goals for the listening sessions and adopt a new model. Overall, the listening sessions should serve as a means for citizens to provide feedback on the public programs that directly impact their livelihood (e.g. housing policies, transportation, employment assistance) in the City of Richmond. In addition to providing a mode for feedback, listening sessions need to have a specific focus and data collection method, otherwise the feedback becomes useless. In other words, having a concrete structure and a specific focus for the listening sessions creates meaning. Additionally, based on the evaluation of the literature and conversations with community engagement experts, any listening session model needs to include strategies to build trust and networks within the community.

To provide an example, as the OCWB has stated that they will focus on workforce development in FY18, the primary focus of the listening sessions in FY18 could be workforce development. In other words, OCWB could listen for what's working in workforce development initiatives, what is not working, and what programs the citizens feel like are needed. The OCWB can then use the data collected at the listening sessions to inform their workforce development policy strategy and serve as a baseline for measurement.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this report is to provide and evaluate various options that address the Office of Community Wealth Building's need for a comprehensive and strategic listening session model. The next section of the report elaborates on the various key stakeholders that need to be considered in any listening session model. The following section explains the six evaluative criteria that will be used to analyze the various options. The remainder of the report focuses on four alternatives. Each alternative is explained in detail, including research that supports the model, logistics and cost estimates, and a thorough evaluation of the tradeoffs based on the established criteria. After the explanation and analysis of the fourth alternative, a summary analysis of the alternatives is presented in a final outcomes matrix. The second to last section of this report focuses on a final recommendation to my client, OCWB Director Reggie Gordon, which will identify the alternative that most effectively addresses the problem statement presented in the introduction of this report. Lastly, as implementation is the key to program success, I also detail findings that could help the OCWB successfully implement my final recommendation.

STAKEHOLDERS IN THE CITY OF RICHMOND

As one of the OCWB's goals is to close a gap in the feedback loop with stakeholders and build trust and relationships within the community, any model for listening sessions needs to consider the relevant stakeholders. The list below describes the key stakeholders.

Low-Income Residents

The most important stakeholder that needs to be involved with OCWB's listening sessions are the low-income residents who will be impacted by policy changes. This includes the 58,471 people who live in poverty in the City. An effective listening session will work with these residents to ensure that the proposed policies help them in the way that they need. There must be a continual and transparent feedback loop with these residents.

Local Non-Profits

There are many non-profits who work with those in poverty in the City of Richmond. These organizations include local food banks, homeless shelters, and nationally recognized organizations like the Boys and Girls Club or the American Red Cross. As these organizations serve those in need, it is crucial that they are also involved with OWCB's listening sessions.

Faith-Based Organizations

There are also many churches and religious groups that work to help those in poverty. For example, the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Richmond serves food to the poor and has programs to help struggling residents get back on their feet. As these religious organizations are on the ground with those in poverty, it is important that their voices are also heard during the policymaking process.

Richmond Police Department

Even though there is tension between Richmond residents and the Richmond Police Department (RPD), RPD is also an important stakeholder as they are out in the Richmond community every day. For example, Sergeant Carol Adams grew-up in Richmond and has been involved in the Richmond community for years, both as a police officer and as the founder of the Carol Adams Foundation, which serves as a resource center for domestic abuse victims. It is important to hear the voice of RPD during OCWB's listening sessions.

Employers

An essential part of poverty relief and wealth building is finding jobs for those who are unemployed. Therefore, employers located in the City of Richmond are important to involve in OCWB's listening sessions. It is essential for OCWB to continue to build partnerships with local employers.

The Mayor's Office

Director Gordon mentioned that Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney has also sparked an interest in listening sessions, but has started to do so through his office. Thus, it is important moving forward that the Mayor and OCWB work together – this will show the Richmond community that there is unity within various branches of the government.

OCWB

As OCWB will be conducting the listening sessions, they are obviously an important stakeholder. The staff at OCWB will serve as the unifying body that brings together all of the other stakeholders and ultimately implements and evaluates any policy changes.

Other Government Agencies

As the OCWB cannot solely alleviate poverty, it is important that they work with other government agencies to ensure that programs are aligned. If programs are duplicative or do not align, that will further deepen the divide between low-income residents and the City government.

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

I have proposed five alternatives (presented in the next section) to assist the Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building with their listening session initiative. The goal of evaluating these alternatives is to provide best estimates of the outcomes that are relevant to the OCWB. Systematically comparing each of the alternatives based on the same established criteria allows for an evidence-based recommendation. Additionally, the goal of the final recommendation is to improve the process for conducting and analyzing listening sessions in Richmond. The alternatives will be evaluated using the following criteria:

Criteria:

1. Effectiveness
2. Administrative Burden
3. Total Cost
4. Implementation Burden
5. Measurability
6. Sustainability

1. **Effectiveness:** The effectiveness of addressing the policy problem will be based on three sub-categories:
    a. *Involves Stakeholders in the Policymaking Process:* Does the proposed policy provide a means for stakeholders to provide feedback on current government provided services?
    b. *Improves Trust within the Community:* Does the proposed policy provide a means of connecting with community members in a meaningful way? Currently there is strong distrust between those in poverty and the government. It is important to select an evidence-based policy that has been found to build trust. This will be estimated in both the short (one year) and long-term (two or more years).
    c. *Builds Relationships and Networks:* Does the proposed policy help communities build networks and relationships? The literature has shown that social capital is important to building and maintaining trust and helping communities solve

problems. This will be estimated in both the short (one year) and long-term (two or more years).

2. **Administrative Burden:** Does the proposed policy alternative create a *low*, *medium*, or *high* administrative burden for the OCWB? This criterion will consider staff, skill, administrative coordination between community members, and office materials.

3. **Total Cost:** What are the total estimated costs for the proposed policy? This criterion will be quantified in dollars using a range of best estimates. Total cost will be further evaluated in the short-term and long-term:
    a. *Short-term (1 year):* Does the proposed policy alternative have *high*, *medium*, or *low* estimated costs in the short-term? Costs that will be considered are initial investments to implement the new policy (e.g. outreach, new hires, or paying participants).
    b. Long-term (2+ years): Does the proposed policy have *high*, *medium*, or *low* estimated costs in the long-term? Costs that will be considered are those that are annual in nature (e.g. salaries).

4. Implementation Burden: Does the proposed policy create a *low*, *medium*, or *high* implementation burden for the OCWB? This criterion will consider the number of community and government agencies necessary for success and implementation time-period.

5. **Measurability:** Is the proposed policy measurable? This criterion will consider whether the policy can be evaluated for success and overall effectiveness using evidence-based practices (e.g. post intervention surveys).

6. Sustainability: Does the proposed policy create a model for community engagement that is sustainable? In other words, can the proposed model be maintained by resources, power, and desire for the program in the long-term?

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

Five policy alternatives were determined for developing a comprehensive and strategic design for the OCWB's listening sessions. These alternatives are based on conversations with Phyllis Brunson (Center for the Study of Social Policy), Saphira Banks (Communitas Consulting), Nancy Deutsch (Professor at UVA and expert in qualitative analysis), and best practices from the literature. Each model presented below considers the newly defined purpose of listening sessions and key stakeholders (see Listening Sessions: A New Purpose section). The five policy alternatives are as follows:

Alternatives:

1. Establish a Focus Group Model for Listening Sessions
2. Utilize Strategic Planning to Enable Listening Sessions to Create Change
3. Create a Logic Model to Help Organize and Evaluate Listening Sessions
4. Adopt a Customer Satisfaction Model for Listening Sessions

Alternative 1: Establish a Focus Group Model for Listening Sessions

This option involves planning and hosting focus groups in the City of Richmond, which will serve as a feedback mechanism for stakeholders. For example, during FY18 the focus groups could concentrate on workforce development government-based initiatives – what is working and what is not working. These focus groups should be held at a local library or community center, not in a government building. The community members in Richmond who are experiencing poverty do not currently trust the government, thus conversations need to happen within their community.

Furthermore, focus groups are typically composed of 7-10 people who are unfamiliar with each other, but share certain characteristics (e.g. income level). By having participants who are unfamiliar with each other, this reduces the potential for groupthink and bias to occur. There is also typically a trained interviewer who asks specific questions and a research aid who takes detailed notes and observes the emotions of the participants.

The overall goal of conducting focus groups is to create a supportive environment that allows freedom of expression by the participants. This option provides an opportunity for OCWB to "get

on the ground" with community members to hear their perspectives in a strategic manner that produces clear results that can be analyzed. The OCWB could hold two focus groups – one for residents in poverty and another for community organizations – this way multiple voices are heard, but without muddling too many stakeholders. By doing so, OCWB would create an open environment and stay true to focus group guidelines (as mentioned above). Moreover, as this option aims to facilitate a supportive environment, participant selection is vital.

Logistics and Cost Estimates

The OCWB should hire a trained professional to conduct and report on the focus group findings. This ensures that the conversation will be appropriately moderated and that the collected data will be evaluated by an expert, thus increasing data trustworthiness. The OCWB could hire a trained focus group expert from a local consulting group (typically has higher costs) or from a local university (tends to have lower costs). The assistance of a research aid also increases data reliability as they serve a strictly observational role.

There are also several challenges associated with focus groups. For instance, recruiting people to participate, especially those who are low-income, is difficult. However, for the purposes of the OCWB, using monetary incentives to recruit participants is not encouraged. The OCWB should focus on recruiting people who are intrinsically motivated to help their community – not those just interested in earning a paycheck. The OCWB should use already present networks within communities, such as the CWB career stations, and community outreach (e.g. posting flyers) to draw in participants.

The OCWB should also use Richmond Public Library meeting rooms to host the focus groups as a library is more inviting than a government building. These meeting rooms hold up to 12 people and are free to reserve and use for government agencies. Rooms can be reserved on a first-come, first-serve basis and library locations are spread throughout the City of Richmond. Thus, if the OCWB wants to host focus groups for participants in various neighborhoods, there is usually a library nearby, which increases accessibility. Additionally, the OCWB should provide refreshments and light snacks to create a comfortable environment.

The OCWB should hold two focus groups on workforce development in FY18– one specifically targeting those who are in poverty and one targeting professionals (non-profit, faith-based, and

business leaders) who work on poverty relief.[5] A follow-up survey should be administered at the end of the focus group asking participants to reflect on their experiences. This will help those administering the focus groups to understand if they are effective. The data collected from the two focus groups should then be professionally analyzed and organized in a report that is released to the public on the OCWB website. By being transparent about focus group findings, the OCWB will increase their trustworthiness and credibility within the community.

The main costs associated with hosting focus groups are detailed below.

Focus Group Model Component	**Associated Cost**	**Source**
Trained interviewer	$1,000- $2,000 per session	Knight Marketing, Athena
Research aid	$500-$1,000 per session	Knight Marketing, Athena
Community outreach	$60-$200 for 100 flyers	Staples, FedEx
Food and refreshments	$50 per session	Researcher estimate
Recruitment Incentives	$0	
Room Reservation	$0	
Final report	$1,000 - $1,500 per report	Knight Marketing, Athena
TOTAL	**$2,610 - $4,750 per focus group**	

* Estimates are based on current market prices.

[5] Workforce development is a suggested first focus group topic; however, topics should be chosen based on OCWB priorities. In other words, focus group topics should be aligned with OCWB goals.

Evaluation

To evaluate Alternative One, the focus group model was assessed based on the previously established criteria.

Effectiveness: *Low* – Overall, focus groups are not very effective. Firstly, given their quick and focused nature, focus groups only temporarily provide a means for stakeholders to provide feedback. Secondly, as focus groups would be administered by an outside expert, they do not provide a strong means for building trust between the OCWB and community members. Thirdly, it is unlikely that focus groups would help to foster long-term relationships and networks within the community. Given that focus groups are temporary in nature, they do not create a permanent environment for community members to connect.

Administrative Burden: *Low* – Focus groups would be easy for the OCWB to administer given that an outside expert would run the focus groups. Thus, the main administrative burdens that the OCWB would have are: (1) hiring the focus group expert, (2) reserving the focus group location, (3) community outreach, and (4) updating the community post-focus group. As the OCWB would not use monetary incentives to recruit participants, they will most likely also experience difficultly recruiting participants.

Total Annual Cost: *$2,610 - $4,750 per session* – The main costs associated with focus groups are hiring experts to run the focus groups. It is highly advised that experts are hired to foster a welcoming and controlled environment. Focus group experts tend to be trained in qualitative analysis and will be able to ask the right questions at the right time and then effectively analyze the results.

Implementation Burden: *Low* – Focus groups would not have a significant implementation burden on the OCWB as they are temporary in nature and would be administered by an outside expert. Additionally, the time commitment associated with focus groups is relatively short. However, focus groups do need to be planned to have time to recruit participants. Thus, advanced forethought would be an implementation burden for this alternative.

Sustainability: *Low* - This model is not necessarily sustainable. As focus groups typically only focus on "what" questions, once that "what" is identified, focus groups are not necessarily useful anymore. Thus, this mode of stakeholder feedback would no longer be available.

Measurability: *Yes* - Focus groups produce results (both in terms of the data collected in the focus group and in the post-focus group survey) in a short period of time that can quickly be evaluated. This is one of the strongest attributes of focus groups and what makes them an appealing research tool.

A summary of the evaluation of Alternative 1 is found below.

Alternative One Snapshot Analysis	
Pros	**Cons**
Low implementation burden	Requires trained experts (cost and effectiveness)
Medium cost	Not sustainable
Low administrative burden	Difficulty recruiting participants (administrative)
Measurable + quick results	Low effectiveness

Alternative 2: Utilize Strategic Planning to Enable Listening Sessions to Create Change

This option involves utilizing Watson-Thompson et al.'s (2008) strategic planning model to enable community change and improvement, specifically as it relates to poverty in the City of Richmond. This strategic planning model is a multi-step process that guides community coalitions, or listening sessions/groups, to help them determine their vision, mission, and objectives, how they will get there, and their strategies and actionable steps. According to Watson-Thompson et al. (2008), strategic planning should invite multiple and diverse stakeholders into planning, implementing, and evaluating community-determined interventions. Most importantly, "the planning process should include those most affected by the issue, such as residents who may traditionally lack power, as well as those in a position to effect needed changes such as leaders in business and government" (Watson-Thompson et al., 2008). As such, this model helps to empower citizens and build trust within the community.

Such collaborative engagements have been found to help in urban communities experiencing high rates of crime and substance abuse (Berkowitz 2001; Roussos and Fawcett 2000). Moreover, they can be simultaneously carried out in multiple communities. This approach also brings in many different community members who are "on the ground" and can provide needed context to the high poverty rate in the City of Richmond. Additionally, this model can be evaluated using a combination of surveys and an interrupted time-series design (see *Figure 5* in the Literature Review).

Logistics and Cost Estimates

As the planning process involves the inclusion of a diverse group of stakeholders (e.g. low-income individuals, NGOs, employers), the OCWB will need to find a neutral place to hold these stakeholder meetings. The various Richmond Public Libraries have event spaces that can be reserved for larger groups. Depending on the location, these event spaces can hold 25-250 people and are free to reserve and use by government agencies. Furthermore, the OCWB should not spend money on recruiting participation in the community coalitions as the goal is to attract people who intrinsically desire to help their community improve. Instead, the OCWB should use current networks and partnerships and neighborhood flyers to conduct outreach.

To successfully implement this option, the OCWB should hire an Administrative Program Analyst who is an expert in strategic planning and community engagement and who has qualitative and quantitative analysis training. Whomever leads this initiative will need to understand how to design and implement unbiased surveys and how to effectively analyze and track the results. Additionally, as this option requires a continuous focus on logistics and a three-stage implementation (refer to *Figure 4* in literature review for model visual), it makes the most sense to hire someone to specifically focus on this project than to burden a current OCWB employee. The three stages of implementation are: (1a) community assessment and planning, (1b) community intervention, (2) community system change, and (3) assessment of community change (Watson-Thompson et al, 2008). If this design is going to build trust and relationships between OCWB and residents, someone from the OCWB needs to solely focus on the project and continuously be communicating with impoverished Richmond residents.

The costs associated with a strategic planning model are below.

Strategic Planning Model Component	**Associated Cost**	**Source**
Administrative Program Analyst	$33,122.00-$72,165.00 (salary range) annually	Richmond City Gov't
Community outreach	$60-$200 for 100 flyers	Staples and FedEx
Food and refreshments	$100-$200 per meeting	Researcher estimate

Room Reservation	$0	
Recruitment incentives	$0	
TOTAL	**$33,282.00 - $72,565.00 annually**	

* Estimates are based on current market prices.

Evaluation

To evaluate Alternative Two, the strategic planning model was assessed based on the previously established criteria (page 38).

Effectiveness: *High* – Overall, strategic planning is highly effective. Firstly, as one of the core components for the proposed strategic planning model is stakeholder involvement, there is a continuous means for stakeholder feedback. Through meetings and coalition building in the community, stakeholder feedback is also necessary for community change. Secondly, as stakeholders are so heavily involved, it will be easier for the OCWB to begin to build trust as they will be out in the community attending meetings. Lastly, as building community coalitions is a key component of strategic planning, there are strong opportunities for networks and relationships to develop.

Administrative Burden: *High* – Implementing a strategic planning model would create a high administrative burden for the OCWB. The OCWB would first have to hire a new staffer. This staffer would then be in charge for managing the strategic planning model for listening sessions, which would include: (1) outreach, (2) coalition building, (3) organizing meetings with stakeholders, (4) advising communities on action plans, (5) using stakeholder feedback to inform OCWB strategy, and, (6) tracking and evaluating change within the community and producing reports on community change.

Total Annual Cost: *$33,282 – $72,565* – The primary costs associated with the strategic planning model are hiring a new staffer to manage this program and community outreach. These estimates are combined in the range provided above.

Implementation Burden: *High* – As the strategic planning model involves a three-stage implementation, the implementation burden is high. The staffer in charge of this program would have to track and strategically organize when to begin the various stages of the program.

Sustainability: *High* – As this model involves a three-stage implementation, it is purposefully designed to be sustainable in the long-term. Each stage needs to be completed in full for this model to be successful. This option requires commitment from the OCWB and the community.

Measurability: *Yes* – This model offers one of the most comprehensive methods of evaluation. Through the use of interspersed surveys both before the community intervention (e.g. a workforce development program) and after the intervention, change can be tracked using an interrupted time series design (see *Figure 5* in the literature review). Not only would surveys provide valuable qualitative data, but the interrupted time series design would provide helpful quantitative data on community change that would easily be shared with stakeholders.

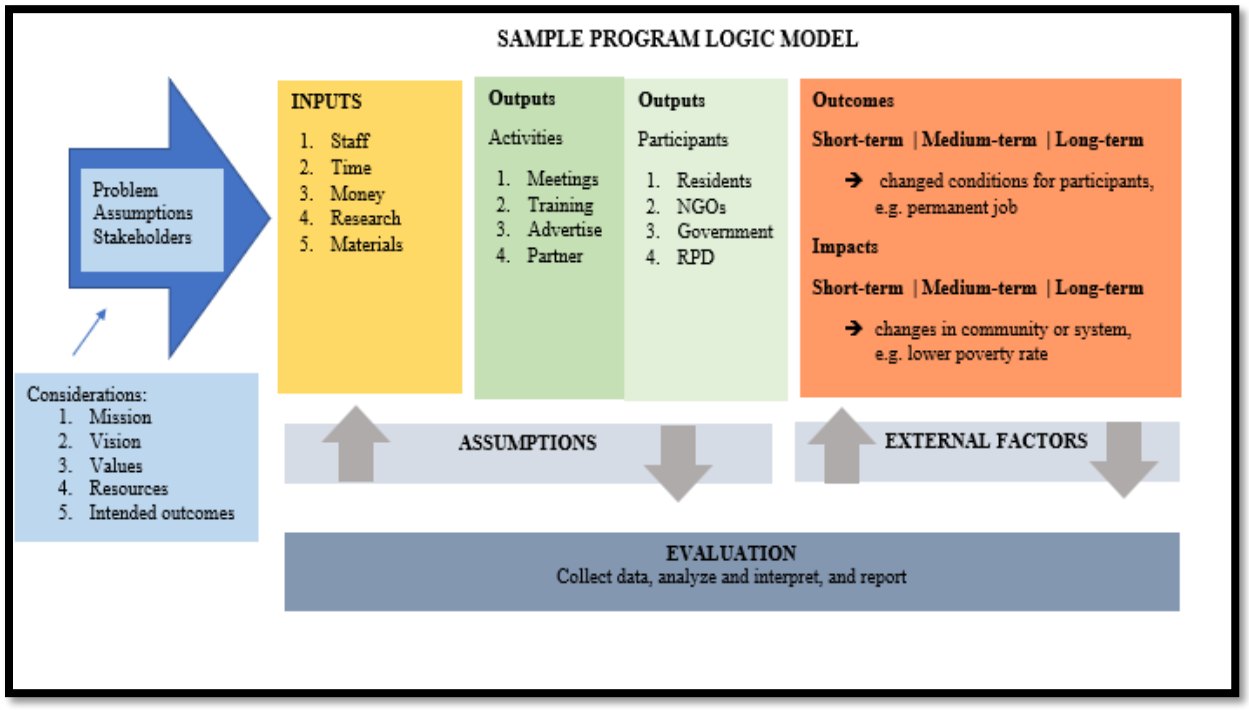
A summary of the evaluation of Alternative 2 is below.

Alternative Two Snapshot Analysis	
Pros	**Cons**
Highly effective	High implementation burden
Strong evaluative method	High cost
Sustainable in the long-term	High administrative burden

Alternative 3: Create a Logic Model to Help Organize and Evaluate Listening Sessions

This option involves using a theory of change, specifically a "logic model," to help organize and evaluate OCWB's listening sessions. Since the 1980s, logic models have been used as tools for program planning, organization, and evaluation (Kaplan & Garrett, 2004). A logical model is essentially a 'map' of the relationship between a program's resources, activities, and intended outcomes (Kaplan & Garrett, 2004). Logic models not only help guide program development and evaluation, but they have also been found to "force participants to articulate and clarify the project's goals and assign responsibility for tasks out outcomes, thereby helping to foster collaboration and build consensus" (Goodman, 1998; McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999; Miller et al., 2001).

OCWB could use a logic model, like the one presented below, to plan, organize, and evaluate their listening sessions. Using such a model would force OCWB to define a clear vision and goals, how they would achieve their desired outcomes, and how they would then evaluate and report on their findings. As show below and determined through the literature, it is important that the key stakeholders are involved in the process. Additionally, as producing a report is an essential part of a logic model, this is another way OCWB could communicate with stakeholders that progress is being made on a given goal or policy. For the purposes of the OCWB's logic model, a theory of



trust would guide this model. In other words, trust would have to present between the inputs and the outputs for the desired outcomes to occur.

Logistics and Cost Estimates

According to McLaughlin (1999), logic models following a series of steps in order to be effective:

1. Collect relevant information
2. Clearly define the problem and its context
3. Define the elements of the logic model (e.g. inputs and outputs and theory of change)
4. Draw the logic model
5. Verify the logic model with stakeholders
6. Measure performance (McLaughlin, 1999).

As a trained expert is not necessary to carry out a logic model, the costs are minimal compared to the other alternatives. As suggested in the other alternatives, the OCWB could use free library event rooms to hold stakeholder meetings. However, the OCWB will still need to conduct outreach (e.g. flyers) in various communities to raise awareness and provide refreshments during stakeholder meetings.

Even though a trained expert is not necessary to implement a logic model framework, there is an opportunity cost to not hiring a trained policy analyst. Specifically, if the burden to get trained on this method and then implementing and evaluating the logic model is placed on a current employee, other OCWB programs could suffer.

The main costs associated with this alternative are outlined below.

Logic Model Component	**Associated Cost**	**Source**
Community outreach	$60-$200 for 100 flyers	Staples and FedEx
Food and refreshments	$100 - $200 per meeting	Researcher Estimate
Room Reservation	$0	
Recruitment incentives	$0	
TOTAL	**$160 - $400 per meeting**	

* Estimates are based on current market prices.

Evaluation

To evaluate Alternative Three, the logic model design was assessed based on the previously established criteria.

Effectiveness: *Medium* **–** Using a logic model for listening sessions has an overall medium ranking for effectiveness. Firstly, logic models do not provide a consistent means for stakeholders to provide feedback. Even though meetings and feedback are necessary outputs, there comes a point where feedback is no longer necessary to move forward with the logic model. Based on this, logic models will not be able to help build trust within the Richmond community in a consistent manner. However, through the use of meetings and partnerships, it is estimated that networks and relationships can be formed.

Administrative Burden: *Medium* **–** Creating a logic model, while not requiring an expert, will consume OCWB staff time. Logic models require an evaluation of current resources, planning, and establishing a concrete evaluation method. Thus, this option would produce a medium administrative burden on the OCWB.

Total Annual Cost: *$160 - $400* **–** Overall, the costs associated with using a logic model are low. The primary costs come from community outreach and providing refreshments at stakeholder meetings.

Implementation Burden: *Medium* **–** Overall, this option is not difficult to implement. However, it does require planning for the long-term (e.g. goals, meetings, evaluation, and reporting), which is why it has a medium implementation ranking.

Sustainability: *High* **–** The very nature of a logic model requires planning for the long-term, which insinuates that resources and desire exist to make the program sustainable. Based on this, overall sustainability is rated as high.

Measurability: *Yes* **–** Through the use of surveys and program evaluation (e.g. number of people placed in permanent jobs annually), the OCWB can collect data using a logic model design. This data could then be released to the public in an annual report.

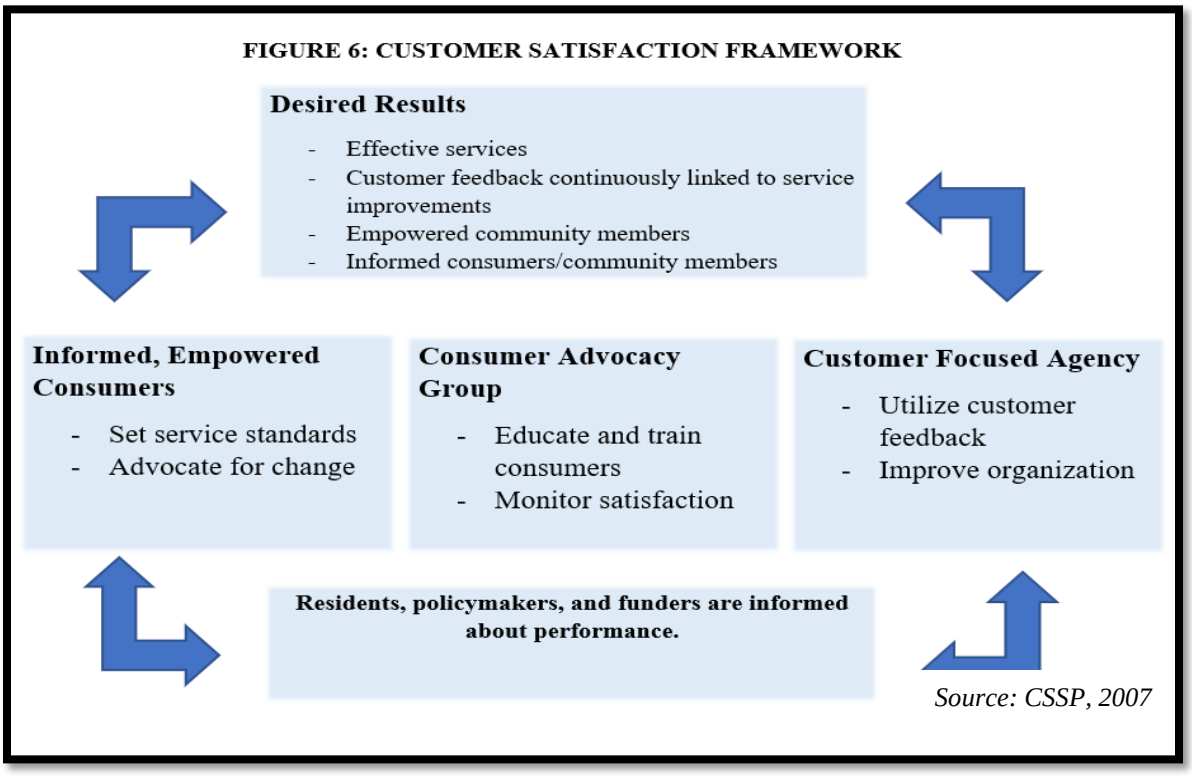
A summary of the evaluation of Alternative 3 is below.

Alternative Three Snapshot Analysis	
Pros	**Cons**
Low costs	Medium implementation burden
Medium effectiveness	*Does not provide long-term feedback or trust building mechanism
Strong measurability	Medium administrative burden
Highly sustainable	

Alternative 4: Adopt a Customer Satisfaction Model for Listening Sessions

This option involves adopting a customer satisfaction model from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP). According to CSSP (2007), a customer satisfaction model aims to apply the principles and strategies of the business sector to that of vulnerable neighborhoods and the government agencies that serve their residents. This model is "based upon a premise that communities can work in partnership with public agency leaders and staff, and neighborhood consumer advocacy organizations to improve access and quality to goods and services" (CSSP, 2007). The key to this approach is that you ask the people in need what is working and what is missing so that there can be more effective results.

The framework for this model is results driven, as shown in *Figure 6*. Then, through the use of informed and engage consumers and a community established advocacy group, residents, policymakers, and funders who care about quality services are also informed about performance.



CSSP has identified three points of entry for the customer satisfaction model. However, the point that is the most applicable to OCWB is the first entry point: *Consumer Report Card*. This entry point uses a community consumer report card to measure customer satisfaction of a variety of

services that impact one's quality of life, such as nutrition, safety, education, employment, housing, and/or transportation. Through the use of surveys to provide feedback on such services, "residents are empowered to become a new, rarely targeted market base" (CSSP, 2007). This measurement tool would be used to trigger open discussion about the effectiveness of specific services as well as opening-up accessibility and accountability from the consumer's perspective. Additionally, as shown in *Figure 6*, through the empowerment of consumers and help from the OCWB, a community consumer advocacy group could be formed in the community. The OCWB could thus bridge the divide and help establish relationships between residents, non-profits, and government agencies. Moreover, the consumer survey data would inform more strategic anti-poverty policy based on what Richmonders define as their top need(s).

Logistics and Cost Estimates

In order to provide a smooth transition to this business mindset, the OCWB will need to contact the CSSP to request staff training on this model. Additionally, the OCWB should hire an Administrative Project Analyst to specifically focus on this project as it does require significant staff time and attention to detail. For instance, someone will need to monitor staff training for this model and evaluate consumer report card results. Hiring someone as an Administrative Project Analyst costs between $33,122.00 - $72,165.00 annually.

The OCWB will also need to conduct community outreach (e.g. flyers) to inform low-income residents that they are collecting "customer satisfaction" feedback on public programs and services. Additional costs to this alternative are difficult to monetize. For example, all OCWB staffers who interact with customers will need to receive training on this new model. From the available information in reports, the Center for the Study of Social Policy assists various groups with this training free of cost. Furthermore, the OCWB will need to decide how they want to collect customer satisfaction feedback – either via paper or electronic survey. If they decide to use paper surveys, this would require that they pull from their printing budget. If they decide to use electronic surveys, the cost depends on what survey tool they decide to utilize and the mode of generating responses (e.g. do they simply send emails with a link to the survey or do they purchase iPads and go door-to-door). Regardless, the OCWB should not pay participants to answer surveys as they want to attract those who are intrinsically motivated to assist their community.

The costs of using a customer service model are outlined below.

Customer Service Model Component	**Associated Cost**	**Source**
Administrative Project Analyst	$33,122.00 - $72,165.00 (salary range) annually	Richmond City Govt
Community outreach	$60-$200 for 100 flyers	Staples and FedEx
Print Survey	$0.21 for 10 B&W pages at Staples X 1,000 copies = $210 *high estimate*	Staples
Electronic Survey (via Survey Monkey)	$408 - $1,188 annual membership (range in services)	Survey Monkey
iPad Purchase (for door-to-door)	$100-$400 per iPad (refurbished on WalMart.com)	Walmart
Recruitment Incentives	$0	
TOTAL (print)	**$33,392.00 – $72,365.21 annually**	
TOTAL (electronic)	**$33,690.00 - $73,953.00 annually**	

* Estimates are based on current market prices.

Evaluation

To evaluate Alternative Three, the logic model design was assessed based on the previously established criteria.

Effectiveness: *High* **–** Overall, using a customer satisfaction model for listening sessions is highly effective. Firstly, the customer satisfaction model's core is based on receiving stakeholder feedback – without it, the model fails. Thus, this model has a strong method for stakeholders to provide input. Secondly, as this model utilizes stakeholder input and a "customer first" mentality, there is a mechanism for building trust within the community because the process is fair and transparent. Lastly, as part of the customer satisfaction model involves building a community advocacy coalition (see *Figure 6*), there is a mechanism for building relationships and networks within the community.

Administrative Burden: *High* **–** Using a customer satisfaction model has a high administrative burden. Firstly, the OCWB would need to hire a new staffer to manage this program as it would need continuous monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, as this option would involve a shift in culture for the OCWB, all staff would need to be trained on the customer satisfaction method. Additionally, as there is a continuous feedback loop, need for transparency and OCWB visibility within vulnerable communities, and survey evaluation, this option is time consuming in the long-term.

Total Annual Cost: *$33,690 – $73,953* **–** The main costs associated with this option are: (1) hiring a new staffer, and (2) survey implementation. Provided in the cost estimate is a salary hiring range and two methods for implementing the consumer report cards – either electronically via Survey Monkey or printed paper copies. The estimates above include both the salary and survey ranges.

Implementation Burden: *Medium* **–** The main burden associated with implementation is the need to train staffers in the customer first mentality. The Center for the Study of Social Policy would need to send a representative to help the OCWB shift their work mentality to that of customer satisfaction. However, after they receive the training, such a mindset should become second nature in the OCWB and not be considered a burden in the long-term.

Sustainability: *Uncertain* **–** As this option has a high level of administrative burden, it is uncertain whether the OCWB would want to maintain the program in the long-term. Even though the desire and power to uphold the program might exist, resources could deplete in the long-term. According to the CSSP, this is a trend they have experienced with government offices that have utilized this program.

Measurability: *Yes* **–** Through the use of consumer report card surveys, the OCWB can establish a baseline score for public program satisfaction. After the baseline is established, they can use that feedback to make program changes. Then, they can utilize future surveys to track changes to programs (e.g. a workforce development program) and how the community reacts to that program change.

A summary of the evaluation of Alternative 4 is below.

Alternative Four Snapshot Analysis	
Pros	**Cons**
Highly effective	High administrative burden
Medium implementation burden	High costs
Strong evaluation method	Uncertain level of sustainability

SUMMARY OUTCOMES MATRIX

In order to comprehensively compare the various models for OCWB's listening sessions, each alternative was compared in an outcomes matrix. The final outcomes matrix is below.

Evaluation Criteria	Impact Description		Policy Alternatives			
			1. Establish a Focus Group Model for Listening Sessions	2. Utilize Strategic Planning to Enable Listening Sessions to Create Change	3. Create a Logic Model to Help Organize and Evaluate Listening Sessions	4. Adopt a Customer Satisfaction Model for Listening Sessions
Effectiveness	Involves stakeholders in policymaking process		Low	High	Low	High
	Improves Trust Within Community	Short-term (1 year)	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium
		Long-term (2+ years)	Low	High	Medium	High
	Builds Relationships and Networks Within Community	Short-term (1 year)	Low	Medium	Medium	High
		Long-term (2+ years)	Low	High	High	High
Administrative Burden	Level of Administrative Difficulty		Low	High	Medium	High
Total Annual Cost	Short-term (1 year)		$2,610 - $4,750 per session	$33,282 - $72,565	$160 - $400	$33,690 - $73,953
	Long-term (2+ years)		$2,610 - $4,750 per session	$33,282 - $72,565	$160 - $400	$33,690 - $73,953
Implementation Burden	Level of Impementation Difficulty		Low	High	Medium	Medium
Sustainability	Resources, power, and desire exist to maintain the program in the long-term		Low	High	High	Uncertain
Measurability	Outcomes can be evaluated using evidence based analyses		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

FINAL RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Community Wealth Building could best structure their listening sessions by implementing a *Customer Satisfaction Model* (Alternative 4). To reach this conclusion, I evaluated each alternative's overall effectiveness, administrative burden, potential costs, long-term sustainability, implementation burden, and the ability to measure listening session success. Each option brings a unique approach to conducting listening sessions and valuable features. However, after careful consideration of the goals of the listening sessions and prioritizing the effectiveness of each option, Alternative 4 has the greatest potential to develop a comprehensive and strategic design for OCWB's listening sessions, establish concrete data analysis methods, and build trust.

Alternative 1, Establishing a Focus Group Model, was not recommended because it was not as effective overall as the other options. Additionally, focus groups are not part of a continuous cycle; thus, they would not provide a sustainable method for community engagement. However, if the OCWB does decide to conduct focus groups as part of their broader listening session strategy, the focus group methods mentioned in the Literature Review and the logistics section in Alternative 1 are important to consider.

Alternative 2, Utilizing a Strategic Planning Model, was not recommended for several reasons. Firstly, this option is not as effective in the short-term as Alternative 4 since community coalitions take time to establish and will most likely take longer than the first year to become effective. Secondly, this option is more difficult to implement as it has a phased-in process that needs continuous observation and analysis. Even though this option offers the most concrete method of analysis (surveys and an interrupted time series design), its high implementation burden and administrative burden is a barrier to success.

Finally, despite its low cost and low level of administrative and implementation difficulty, Alternative 3, Creating a Logic Model, was not recommended. Even though logic models are an evidence-supported method of organization and analysis, this method is not as effective in the context of meeting the goals of the listening sessions. Additionally, as stakeholders are not continuously involved, this option is not as effective at building trust and relationships as Alternative 4.

Based on my analysis of all proposed alternatives, I propose that the Office of Community Wealth Building **adopt a Customer Satisfaction Model for Listening Sessions with the intent of gaining impoverished resident feedback on public goods and services, improving trust, and building relationships and networks within the Richmond community**. Even though this option has the highest cost of all of the proposed alternatives, as reducing poverty is a high priority for the OCWB and the Mayor of Richmond, the costs are justified. Additionally, Alternative 4 is the best listening session model to create sustainable, effective, and impactful change for Richmonders living in poverty.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

In conducting research on listening sessions and community engagement, there were several themes that occurred that are worth reiterating. These themes center around the best practices of listening sessions, which conclude that listening sessions need to be focused, goal driven, involve a diverse group of stakeholders, and be measurable. Whereas the customer satisfaction model will address these best practices, there are a few points related to strategy to highlight that will make the implementation and analysis of this model easier.

1. The Center for the Study of Social Policy implemented the customer satisfaction model in Montgomery County's Department of Health and Human Services in Maryland. The OCWB should review the CSSP's report on this intervention. Overall, the report found that: (1) customer satisfaction with services improved, (2) customers felt empowered, and (3) staff morale increased.

2. The OCWB should use GIS mapping provided by the Richmond Assessor's Office to help identify which areas in Richmond have high levels of poverty. This data could be used to target which communities have the highest need. As a result, those high-need neighborhoods could be the first to receive the consumer report cards and have the highest level of staff focus. By doing so, interventions and report card implementation are targeted and strategic.

3. As the OCWB has approximately $400,000 in their FY18 budget to hire new workforce development staff, some of that funding should go towards hiring someone who will solely focus on the listening session program. As the customer satisfaction model requires knowledge of qualitative analysis and being able to produce reports that can be shared with stakeholders, it is vital that whomever implements the listening sessions knows how to conduct qualitative analysis correctly.

4. Listening session meetings cannot occur in a government building as this is a barrier to low-income resident participation in community change. Both the literature and experts, such as Phyliss Brunson with CSSP, have confirmed this as a barrier. To increase accessibility and trust, meetings should be held within the community, such as at a public library or school.

5. Listening sessions must be evaluated to determine if they are effective. Through the use of community report cards, the OCWB can establish a baseline score of programs and then alter programs based on that feedback. After a program has changed, follow-up report cards can be used to track customer satisfaction thereafter.

   To provide a more concrete example of what a consumer report card would ask, here is an example from the CSSP Customer Satisfaction report (2007):

Dear Customer,

In an effort to continually improve the quality of the service we provide we depend on feedback from our valued customers. Please take a moment to evaluate our performance.

RATINGS: 4 = Excellent 3 = Good 2 = Fair 1 = Poor

___ Ease of access to help you requested
___ Timeliness of service delivery or problem resolution
___ Effectiveness of solution/information
___ Courteous service
___ Overall handling of your case
___ Satisfaction with the final service or resolution today
___ Overall quality of service received

Please help us improve our service by providing comments about how we may better serve your needs in the future: _____

_____

_____

Thank you from your friends in the Division of Economic Support.

Furthermore, based on conversations with experts about the recommended model, the customer satisfaction model has three theories of change that need to be considered. These three theories of change build upon each other and are necessary for the long-term success of the customer satisfaction model.

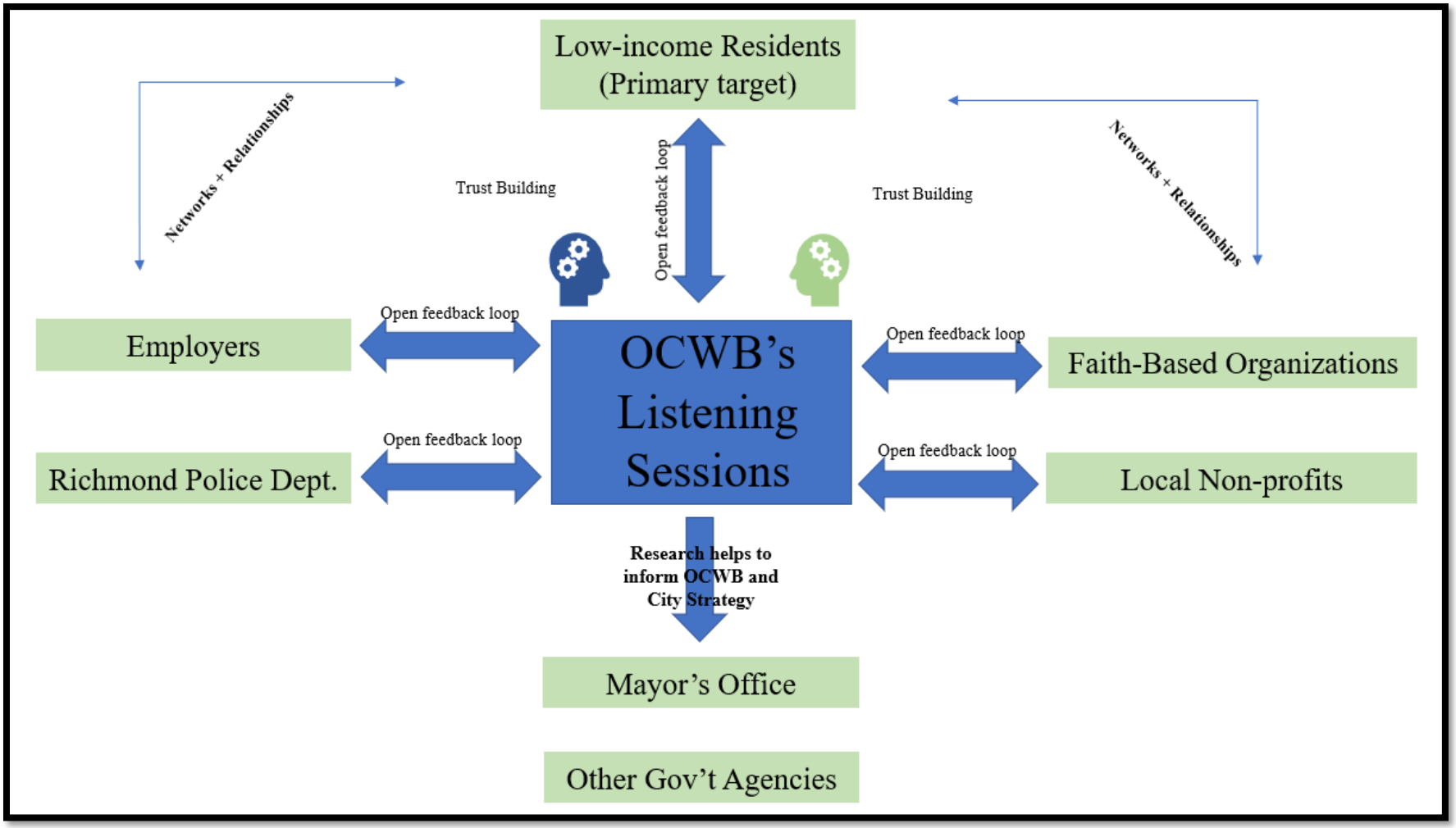
1. *Trust and empowerment of residents* – in order for this model to be successful, trust must be a central focus. According to the CSSP (2007), researchers have found that "service satisfaction is a strong driver of citizen trust and confidence in public institutions." However, to build trust through this model, the OCWB also has to be transparent, visible, and set expectations.

2. *Networks and relationships* – a second component to the success of this model is being able to build networks and relationships within the community. By establishing a community advocacy group, the OCWB will help build citizen investment in government programs and have their voice be part of the change process. Additionally, the OCWB can help connect citizens with local employers and NGOs who can provide jobs and assistance, respectively.

3. *Research* – whereas the OCWB is not yet prepared to conduct research, this could be a long-term goal that evolves from the customer satisfaction model. But, in order for field research to be productive, they first need to focus on building trust and relationships within the community. If trust and relationships are strong within the Richmond community, the OCWB could become a leader in research and set an example for other city governments. For example, with the presence of trust and concrete relationships, the OCWB could easily conduct research using participatory action research and focus groups (see Literature Review). In the long-term and with the proper implementation of the customer satisfaction model, the OCWB could become a leading organization in social policy research.

Through adopting the customer satisfaction model and fulfilling the three previously mentioned theories of change, stakeholders would provide and receive feedback, trust and networks would be formed, and OCWB research would inform City strategies for poverty relief (see the Stakeholder Map below).

Stakeholder Ecosystem Map



The Importance of Trust and Social Capital

As mentioned in the literature, listening sessions provide the building blocks for trust, which is a key factor in poverty reduction (McElmurry et. al.,1990). According to Warren et al. (2001), "building trust and cooperation across communities can help provide the basis for strengthening the social fabric of the whole society and creating a national consensus for combating poverty." This concept is further supported by an analysis completed by Knack and Zac (2003) where they found that if "trust is sufficiently low, so little investment will be undertaken that economic growth is unachievable, resulting in a low-trust poverty trap." However, in an area such as Richmond where those in poverty deeply distrust the government, building trust is incredibly difficult.

According to Colquitt and Salam (2009), there are several key factors that can help build trust.

1. *Benevolence* – the OCWB must show concern and loyalty to their mission of reducing poverty.
2. *Integrity* – the OCWB must adhere to their ethical principles and maintain openness and visibility within the Richmond community.
3. *Organization* – the OCWB must set expectations and be fair and transparent during their policymaking process.

Even though the process for shifting to a customer satisfaction model may not be easy for the Office of Community Wealth Building, it is the most effective means of providing meaningful and necessary change for those in poverty. It is time to empower those who have felt invisible, work to earn their trust, and help them build their social capital.

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