

Final Report September 30, 2003

**Do You Know the Way
to Self-Sufficiency?**



WORKBOOK

A Companion Document to:
**A Case Study Report on
Using a Self-Sufficiency
Framework to Guide Workforce
Development Programs and Policies**

A Collaborative Study from:



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SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

About This Workbook

This workbook is designed to help community-based organizations think about possibilities for providing employment and training support services within an overarching framework that looks beyond an individual's immediate needs to the long-term objective of achieving self-sufficiency.

The workbook does this by presenting key concepts related to this framework—the “self-sufficiency continuum”—and posing questions for consideration within the context of your particular organization. In particular, the workbook asks you to:

- Think about whether your mix of program services can support individuals throughout the journey to self-sufficiency.
- To consider what strategies might help address any service gaps along the continuum.

Then, to help you complete this evaluation, you are asked to map your “clients” needs against the services your organization provides, using a schematic of the self-sufficiency continuum.

This workbook draws on concepts and information presented in a research report titled: *Do You Know the Way to Self-Sufficiency? A Case Study Report on Using a Self-Sufficiency Framework to Guide Workforce Development Programs and Policy*.

A companion document (*Program Profiles: Community-Based Organizations That Deliver Workforce Development and Training Programs and Support Services*) and other materials (including this workbook) are available at the following Web sites:

- MASSCAP: <http://www.masscap.org/wfd.html> >>
- DHCD: <http://www.state.ma.us/dhcd> >>

About This Project

The research and associated materials are products of a unique partnership between the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), Massachusetts Community Action Program Directors' Association (MASSCAP), and Commonwealth Corporation with its research partner, FutureWorks. The project also received support from numerous community, workforce, and economic development agencies, including, but not limited to, the Massachusetts Workforce Board Association, the Hispanic-American Chamber of Commerce, and the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations.

Principal funding for this project was provided by United States Department of Health and Human Services. Sponsor/co-funders included the National Center for Adult Learning and Literacy (Cambridge) and the Center for Law and Social Policy (Denver).

Do You Know the Way to Self-Sufficiency?

This project focused primarily on economic self-sufficiency, which, in this context, goes beyond meeting federal poverty guidelines. We recognize that there are also social, cultural, and civic dimensions to self-sufficiency; however, the time and resources available for this project did not enable us to research these other relevant aspects.

SECTION 2. THINKING ABOUT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ALONG A CONTINUUM

Initial Concepts and Considerations

Many people are considered low income despite full-time employment. This suggests that finding a job is not always enough, and that individuals and families benefit from having access to a continuum of support on the path to achieving self-sufficiency.

A way of providing that long-term support is to organize program services within a self-sufficiency continuum framework.

What is a self-sufficiency continuum?

A framework within which an organization provides access to a succession of education, training, and employment-related services—along with an array of wrap-around support services—through the duration of an individual’s or a family’s journey from poverty to economic self-sufficiency.

Organizations that use this framework provide access to both “deep” and “wide” supports along the path toward self-sufficiency. *Deep* supports and services are comprehensive, covering a host of family basic needs; *wide* refers to the time frame in which services and supports are provided. These organizations consider the whole person or family and focus equal attention on connecting people to safe and affordable housing, childcare, and reliable transportation. Considerable emphasis is also placed on developing supportive social networks and a positive, forward-looking attitude.

Why use this framework?

In the United States today there is widespread acceptance among policymakers and practitioners that employment is the key to economic self-sufficiency. There is also growing awareness, however, that the “work first” emphasis of the current public policy framework promotes a short-term emphasis on job placement at the expense of long-term services and supports that enable individuals to advance to jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. While thousands of low-income individuals have entered the labor market in recent years, research reveals that few have made the gains necessary to become economically self-sufficient.

While the current federal policy framework promotes “work first,” the self-sufficiency construct emphasizes the long-term nature of poverty alleviation. It reflects practitioners’ experience that lasting solutions to poverty require the integrated and sequential delivery of education, training, and supports that enable low-income individuals to acquire the skills and competencies they need to move up the career ladder into higher paying, stable jobs. Increasingly, the concept of self-sufficiency is entering the public debate, shaping the way legislators think about policy and the way service providers perform their jobs.

If organizations intend to support individuals and families along the continuum, then they may need to revisit their service mix, partnerships, and perhaps organizational structure. Strategic partnerships with other providers of key services are the foundation for weaving disparate supports into a comprehensive package that can favorably impact an individual's ability to increase their skills, credentials, work experience, and wages.

Funding streams will need to better support a continuum of integrated services that will support workers from poverty to self-sufficiency. A multiplicity of funding sources can be melded to support these initiatives.

Organizations using this type of approach have described the value of providing services along a continuum that is holistic, integrated, and long-term. Key benefits include:

- *Better meet the needs of clients.* This approach helps keep an organization client-centered instead of program-centered. By starting with an understanding of a client's comprehensive needs and supportive assets, organizations are encouraged to fit programs and services to clients instead of fitting clients to programs.
- *Improve programs and services.* A focus on self-sufficiency helps organizations to clearly identify the short- and long-term services and supports required to help move families out of poverty. Once these are identified, organizations can determine how to expand or partner with other organizations to deliver the necessary supports and services.
- *Better serve employer partners.* A focus on self-sufficiency helps organizations better meet the needs of their employer partners. That is, while it is important to meet the needs of job seekers, it is equally important to meet the needs of employers.

What are the potential barriers to using the framework?

Principal challenges noted by organizations using this type of approach include:

- *The current policy environment.* The “work-first” orientation of the current workforce development system limits pre-employment and incumbent worker training and creates major resource gaps along the self-sufficiency continuum.
- *The tendency for funding to drive services.* Public or private funding sources typically do not include expectations or measures beyond standard program completion, job placement, and starting wages.
- *The newness of self-sufficiency models.* Many organizations may be unfamiliar with self-sufficiency models.
- *The implementation demands requiring a commitment, time, and flexible funds.* Because public workforce development funds do not pay for the development of partnerships and systems focused on progress toward self-sufficiency over the longer term, organizations patch together resources from private industry, foundations, and public demonstration program dollars to achieve their goals.

What seems to work in current uses of this approach?

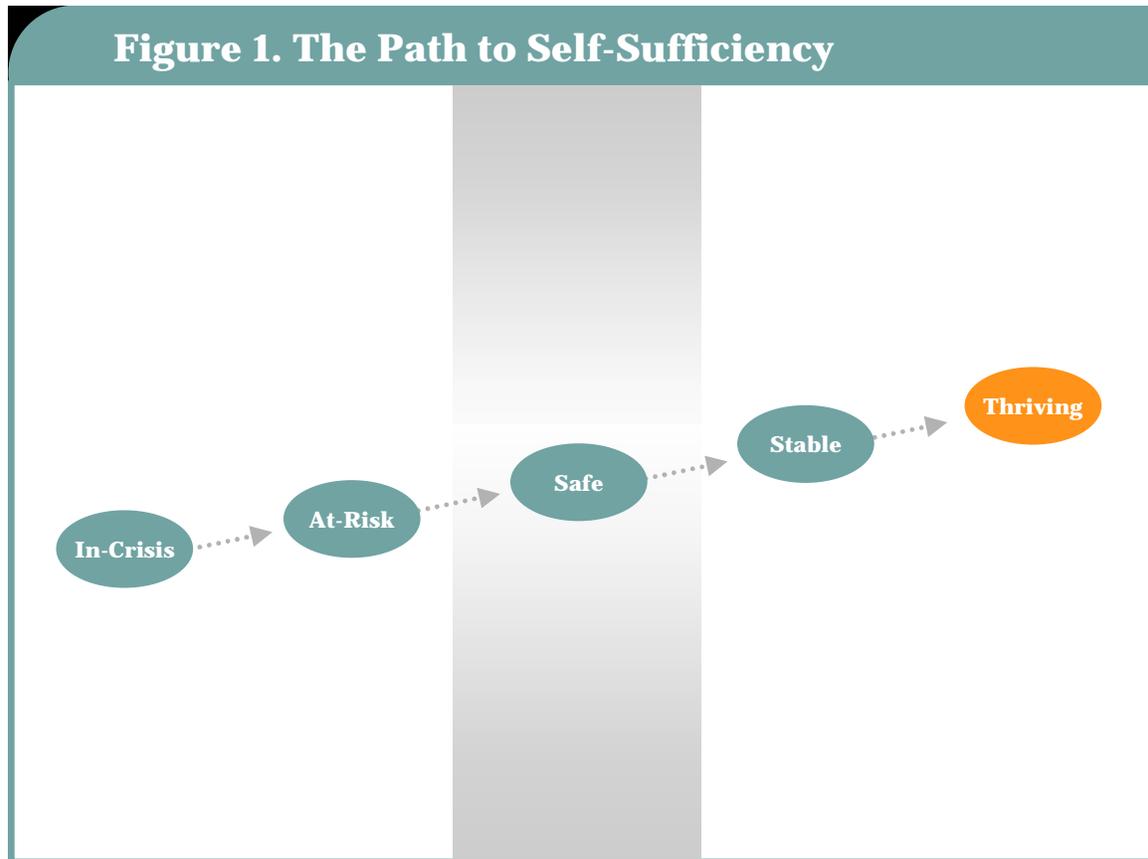
Key success factors identified by organizations working in this area are:

- *Strategic partnerships with other public and private organizations.* A self-sufficiency continuum framework can be used to map the various stakeholders and the services they provide at different stages on the path to self-sufficiency. Mapping the stakeholders and services and sharing this information across stakeholders can be a first step toward developing a shared vision for a more closely integrated and cohesive human service and workforce development system.
- *Building on career ladder initiatives to establish a comprehensive framework.* Career ladder initiatives and job retention and career advancement programs provide important lessons about the appropriate service mix and strategic partnerships required to move clients toward self-sufficiency.

For more information about “what works,” see the case studies in the companion document to this workbook: *Do You Know the Way to Self-Sufficiency? A Case Study Report on Using a Self-Sufficiency Framework to Guide Workforce Development Programs and Policy.*

Stages in Getting to Self-Sufficiency

The schematic below presents an initial view of the continuum framework with the basic stages along the path to self-sufficiency:



Questions for Consideration and Discussion

Before moving on to think about your organization’s programs in the context of the framework, use the following questions to think about and stimulate discussion on the self-sufficiency continuum concept.

Question 1

The self-sufficiency continuum framework assumes a broad view of workforce development. The thinking is that even support services provided at the point when an individual is “in-crisis” or “at-risk” can be viewed (and counted) as promoting that person’s initial progress toward self-sufficiency.

- Does this more expansive view of workforce development seem to make sense? Based on your experience, is it logical to be thinking about workforce development when providing support services to an individual “in-crisis”?

Question 2

Further, the framework assumes that it can be equally important to provide support services after an individual's situation has improved such that he or she is holding a job. The thinking here is that securing a job often is not the end of the story and the need for support services continues. This reflects statistics on the "working poor" in Massachusetts and nationwide.

- Does your experience indicate that there is a need to continue providing support services after a client has found work that puts that client's family in a "safe" or "stable" situation? Is it feasible, given the way your programs are organized and the demands on available resources?

Question 3

Initial research has identified community-based organizations that are achieving success with approaches similar to the framework for implementing workforce development programs. But the research also indicates that using this approach demands a strong commitment to this broader view of workforce development.

- If you agree that this approach might help address shortcomings with current approaches, what do you envision would be the principal challenges to implementing the framework? What would have to change about your organization and what types of resistance might you encounter?

SECTION 3. ASSESSING ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Looking at the Big Picture

When considering the self-sufficiency continuum approach to workforce development, it is important to assess your organization in terms of:

- Support needs of people in your community.
- Programs and services provided across your organization.
- Linkages and coordination with other organizations.

Looking at your organization and its mission from these perspectives will help you to identify any gaps between needs and services relevant to helping people working toward self-sufficiency. You may find, for instance, that based on funding sources your organization is particularly strong in some areas of needed support, but less so in others.

Thinking about your organization's key areas of emphasis in this way will help you prepare to map needs and services along the continuum in the next section of this workbook. Also, it will help you consider an appropriate strategy for providing the full range of services anticipated by the continuum. Key to that strategy may be establishing strategic partnerships with other agencies, academic institutions, or industry groups.

Program Emphasis Exercise

Aim of the Exercise

The aim of this exercise is to have you consider the full range of your organization's program services in the context workforce development over the longer term. It is designed also to help you start identifying service gaps within this context and areas where linkages with other organizations may fill some service gaps.

How to Complete the Worksheet

You are asked to use the worksheet on the following pages to list the characteristics of the target populations for which your organization provides support services, the program services provided by your organization that address the needs of those target populations, and the needed services that are covered by referral or linkages with other organizations.

The worksheet is organized for you to divide this information across three sections: pre-employment, employment-related, and post-employment. Each section of the worksheet includes an example to help get you started.

Worksheet on Program Emphasis

Characteristics of Target Population	Program Support Services (Your Organization's Services)	Support Through Linkages (Other's Service)
PRE-EMPLOYMENT		
<p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No income or assets • No skills or credentials • Homeless or unstable housing • No or unreliable transportation • No or unreliable child care • Safety and mental health risks are high 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach/recruitment • Intake/assessment/screening • Assistance with accessing support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees/immigrants: immigration and torture counseling provided by CDC

Characteristics of Target Population	Program Support Services (Your Organization's Services)	Support Through Linkages (Other's Service)
EMPLOYMENT-RELATED		
<i>Example:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking job or temporary/seasonal job or other legal income • Seeking GED or vocation training • Seeking ESL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life skills training/personal success plan development • Job development/placement • Early career planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESL, VESL, ABE/GED, pre-vocational/employment skills training provided by other CBO

Characteristics of Target Population	Program Support Services (Your Organization's Services)	Support Through Linkages (Other's Service)
POST-EMPLOYMENT		
<i>Example:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employed in permanent or semi-stable job • Career and educational plan in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job retention and advancement supports (e.g., mentoring, peer support groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career advancement supports (e.g., support for licensure) provided by other CBO • Financial literacy and support services (e.g., home ownership counseling) provided by CDC

SECTION 4. MAPPING SERVICES AND NEEDS ALONG THE CONTINUUM

Identifying the Full Array of Services

You've given some thought to how your organization's support services match up against the long-term support needs of your clients as they move along the path to self-sufficiency. As a follow-on to that, this section asks you to map your findings on the continuum framework.

Before you do this, consider the continuum framework on the following page that, as a sample, has been mapped using information from a community-based organization that has used this type of framework for over 5 years. The box on this page provides some descriptive information about how the framework functions.

The next section poses a few follow-up questions for thinking about application of the framework for your organization.

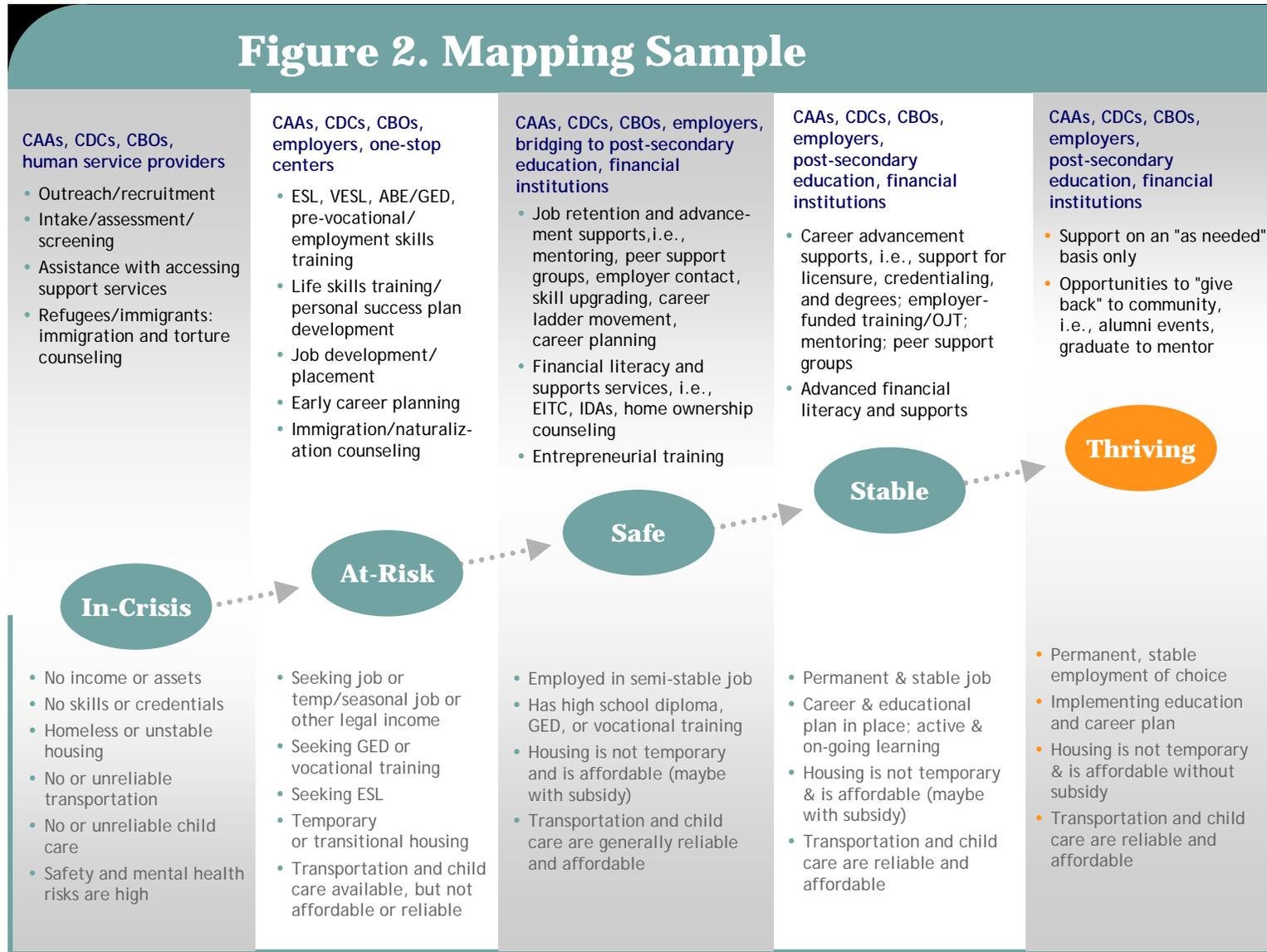
Mapping the Path to Self-Sufficiency: The Framework

The boxes below the continuum include a range of client assets or barriers at each stage. Each stage includes descriptors from various life domains, as adapted from the Massachusetts Scales and Ladders tool, along significant domains, i.e., employment, education/training, housing, transportation, and child care. It would be more appropriate to include all of the descriptors at each of the 10 life domains used in the Scales and Ladders tool; however, this one-page model is designed to simply provide a generalized overview of clients at each stage, as well as the potential services they might need. Before implementing this model, community-based organizations would need to map more comprehensive and specific indicators. This exercise is only asked that you conduct some preliminary mapping.

The boxes above the continuum include the services clients may need to overcome the barriers and strengthen assets. As with the lower boxes, the services listed in these boxes are general and wide-ranging. Different clients will require different services. A community or organization should tailor this model to their community or target population by listing the specific characteristics in the boxes below and the specific services in the boxes above the continuum.

The circles include partners within the workforce development system (broadly defined) who are required to deliver the services. As is clear from the model, this "system" requires many different types of players and many of the same organizations operate at various levels in the continuum. *Helping families move from poverty to self-sufficiency is not the sole domain of community-based organizations. They have a role in this journey; however, other organizations, agencies, and companies must be involved if one is to continue and get to the end of the path.*

Figure 2. Mapping Sample



Mapping Exercise

Aim of the Exercise

The aim of this exercise is to have you develop a more detailed view of the range of program services your organization provides in the context of moving individuals and families along the path to self-sufficiency. By doing this, you should be able to more clearly identify areas where your current programs or organizational linkages leave gaps in needed support services. This should put you in a better position to start thinking about what role your organization should play in meeting the range of workforce development needs and how you might advocate and coordinate with other groups in your community.

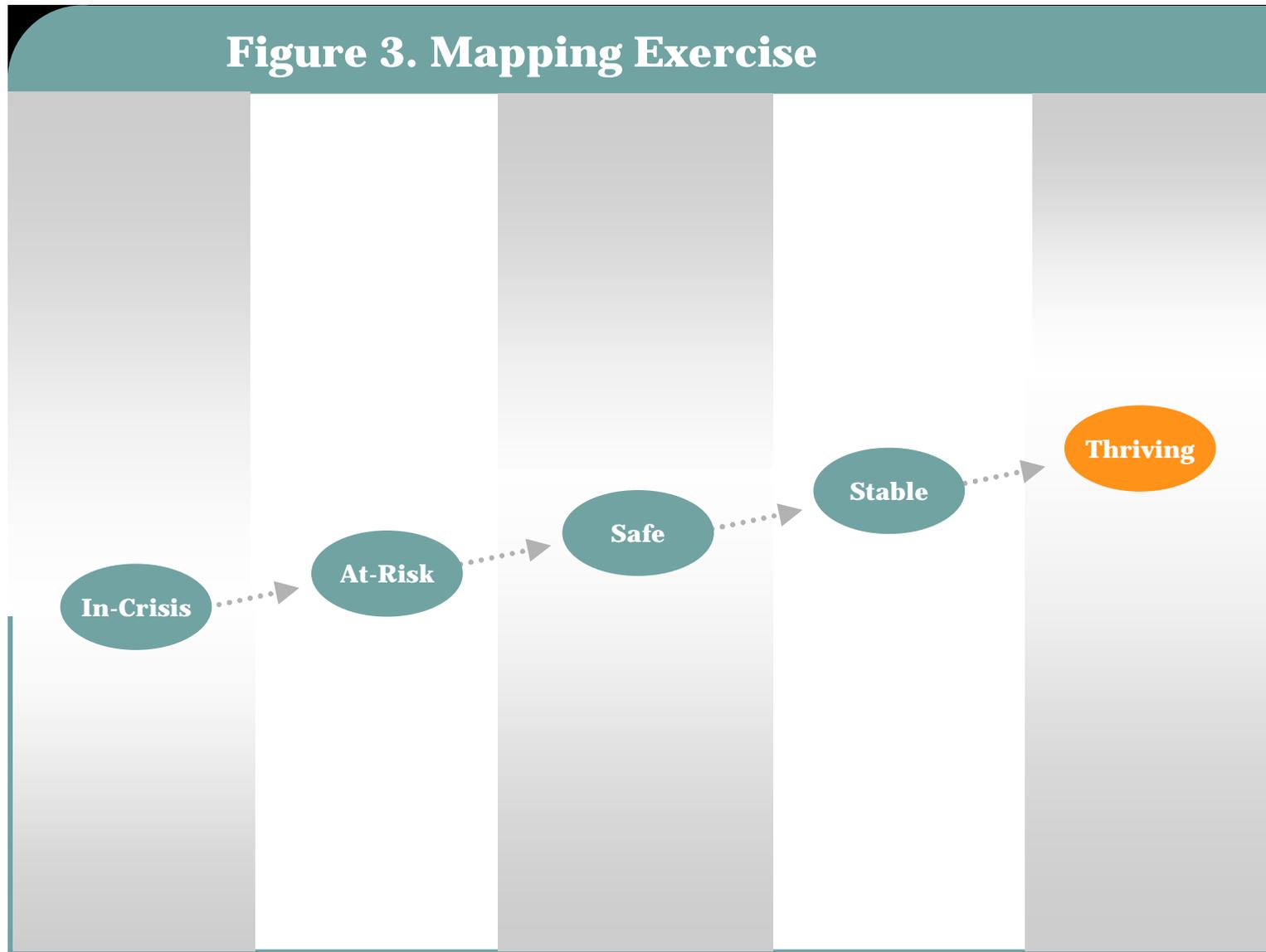
How to Complete the Worksheet

Using the continuum framework, you are asked to map the information you developed in the preceding exercise to gain more specificity by dividing categories of needs and services across the five stages of the path to self-sufficiency—just as it is presented in Figure 2 on the preceding page.

Use the area *below* each pathway stage to list characteristics or needs of target populations in your community. Use the area above each stage to list service providers and the particular services they provide.

When you are finished filling in the Figure 3 worksheet, review it thoroughly. First check to be sure all needs and current services are included and that the division across pathway stages is appropriate. Then review the map to identify areas where needed support services are not covered.

Note: You may need to redraw the continuum framework on a larger piece of paper to more easily complete this exercise.



SECTION 5. EVALUATING STRATEGIES FOR MEETING SERVICE NEEDS

Current Models

There are three principal models to consider regarding how community-based organizations provide supports and services to clients along the self-sufficiency continuum:

1. The organization positioned as a “coach” or “advisor” to clients as they plot their course toward economic independence. In this model, the organization “checks-in” with the client on a regular basis, connects the client to other agencies and resources when necessary, and provides rewards or encouragement at each step along the continuum.
2. The organization forms partnerships with other organizations that operate at higher stages of the self-sufficiency continuum—effectively “passing off” the participant, much as an elementary school passes along a student to middle school.
3. The organization positions itself as an explicit “point of contact” for the individual and family, providing comprehensive support at each step along the continuum.

The service mix and partnerships that community-based organizations engage in appear to be shaped by several factors, including mission, organizational capacity, community resources for workforce development, and target population.

Providing deep and wide education, training, employment, and support services along the self-sufficiency continuum requires both an ambitious mix of client services as well as multiple, strategic partnerships among non-profit, public, and private organizations.

Importantly, many community-based organizations now recognize that moving individuals toward economic self-sufficiency requires an increased focus on employer partnerships. Because employers are the actors that ultimately provide low-income individuals with opportunities for career and wage advancement, an increasing number of community-based organizations are forming or strengthening partnerships with employers in key industry sectors and helping create career paths that can lead low-income individuals toward family-sustaining employment.

Questions for Consideration and Discussion

Based on your mapping of needs and services, the questions below ask you to think about what model is appropriate for your particular organization in implementing the self-sufficiency continuum framework and to think about other important aspects of implementation.

- Which of the three models mentioned above seems like the right fit for your organization?
- Can you envision variations of any of these models that might better suite your organizational mission?

Do You Know the Way to Self-Sufficiency?

- What current partnerships with your organization might be built on to better address needs along the self-sufficiency continuum?
- What new partnerships in your community are possible based on the workforce development needs of your clients?
- Again, what are the barriers/challenges you would anticipate? And how might you address them?
- Do what extent is funding a challenge and what opportunities might exist for accessing funding sources to address service gaps?
- What advantages do you anticipate this framework might present for tracking/measuring your organization's performance in meeting mission-related and other goals?

A Final Note

Your mapping of needs and services along the continuum as well as your preliminary thinking about how to implement the self-sufficiency continuum framework may serve as the basis for discussions with others in your area involved in workforce development. And it may provide an initial foundation for establishing a more integrated approach to helping people in your community move up and out of poverty.