



EMPOWERMENT ECONOMICS

PRACTITIONER HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, you will:

- Learn about the six core elements of Empowerment Economics, and;
- Identify ways an organization or program meets these core elements.

INTRODUCTION

For many of our communities, wealth and US nation building have been painful.

It has meant loss of land, a loss of cultural traditions and language, and loss of identity. Those in positions of power have prioritized individual wealth and gain over the well-being of our communities. In response, we have continued our time-honored practice of following the examples of our ancestors and ancestral lands to continue with our own local economies that meet the needs of our communities where the US system has fallen short. We have used traditional knowledge and practices to create communities, inform our gathering of resources, and share through giving and lending circles to help families meet their most pressing needs and to support reunification of families separated by transnational borders and walls.

At the same time, our people have worked hard in the US market system to live and raise families so our children and grandchildren could have economic opportunities due to them, but our contributions have largely been ignored. Instead, we have too often been blamed and shamed as being the problem.

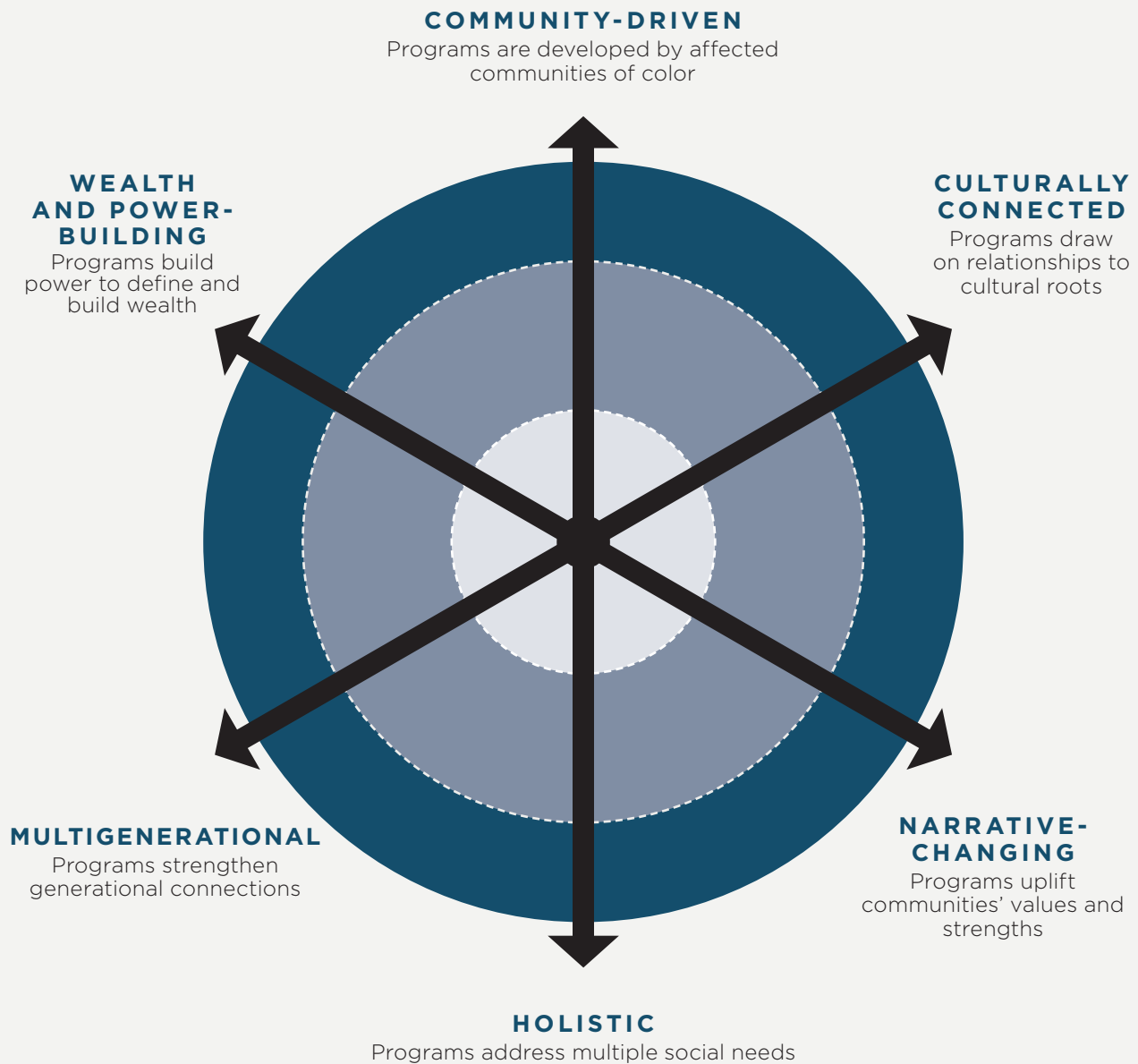


In this photo: HANA Center

Empowerment Economics recognizes this is the reality we live in but rather than give in to hopelessness and hatred, it calls on us to walk with a foot in both our community-rooted economy and the US market system. It says that we can — and must — continue to build our own communities and local economies to meet the needs of our people. It also says that we have the responsibility to find strength in the magnificent examples of self-sufficiency of our communities, past and present, and to bring those forward to change minds and discriminatory systems we encounter every day so they will serve our people better in the future.

Empowerment Economics is a multigenerational, culturally rooted approach to building wealth and power in low-income, native communities and communities of color. There are six core elements that make up empowerment economics.

SIX CORE ELEMENTS OF EMPOWERMENT ECONOMICS



LESSON 1

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, you will:

- Learn how your organization or program is currently applying the six core elements of Empowerment Economics, and;
- Identify where your organization or program wants to be in implementing Empowerment Economics.

INTRODUCTION

As we learned in the last lesson, how our organizations or programs apply the core elements of Empowerment Economics are different and can range widely.

The power of the Empowerment Economics model is that there is no one path forward. What makes sense for the Native Hawaiian community in changing the economic narrative in the Hawaiian Islands may not make sense for the Chinese-American community in New York City Chinatown.

Despite these differences, our stories intersect through the core elements of Empowerment Economics. Together, our communities are part of a nation where our narratives have largely been told from the perspective of a white male, heterosexual dominant culture — if our stories are told at all. This false storytelling leads to policy at the local, state, and federal levels of government that has limited our ability to build wealth and power to improve our communities' well-being.

While we grew up benefitting from the value of multigenerational families helping one another, the predominant United States narrative tells us to value individualism above the community.

When we embrace culture as an asset, the mainstream narrative spits out myths that blame and shame our communities as economic “problems”.

Our strength in combating this dominant narrative is rooted in our communities and our way of looking at the world that is naturally more holistic. Empowerment Economics calls on each of us to tell the true story of our communities, a narrative that links community, culture, and family to action. It is through storytelling and mobilizing the strength of community that we will reclaim our narratives and change the reality.



In this photo: Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)

TELLING YOUR ORGANIZATION OR PROGRAM'S EMPOWERMENT ECONOMICS STORY

In the last lesson, we asked you to write about your organization or program's Empowerment Economics story. Pair up with another participant who is not from your organization and take turns telling the Empowerment Economics story of your organization or program. Listeners should hear the story and share with their partner what ways their program or organization is applying the six core elements today.

**MY ORGANIZATION-PROGRAM/
NOT MY ORGANIZATION-PROGRAM**

My Organization-Program	Not My Organization-Program

LESSON 2

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, you will:

- Articulate your organization or program's Empowerment Economics goals;
- Identify barriers and internal support and resources to achieve these goals, and;
- Establish an internal organization or program action plan to use support and resources to overcome identified barriers.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment Economics is rooted in taking action to improve our community's power, wealth, and access to the resources needed for collective well-being. Historically, our organizations and communities have been under-resourced, which has limited our ability to build the power and wealth needed to achieve collective well-being.

Now that we can share our organization or program's Empowerment Economics story, we are in a better position to identify the resources and barriers in our path to mobilize for community wealth and well-being.

Key to action is our organization, programs, and communities' abilities to embrace change. Change in our organizations, programs, and communities is constant. Still, when we attempt to create change there are internal and external barriers that must be addressed or no action will take place.

At the same time, there are supports and resources within our organizations or programs that can be used to overcome these barriers.

In this lesson, we will identify the internal barriers, support, and resources that exist for your organization, program, or a new program and start documenting steps to address these barriers to embrace the core elements of Empowerment Economics.

IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO GOALS

Review your Empowerment Economics Wheel in Lesson 1.

Choose at least 1 core element that you believe is the most important to your organization or program and fill out the table below. List a specific goal for at least 1 core element to apply Empowerment Economics.

Now think about what stands in your organization or program's way in reaching the core element goal.

What is the barrier or barriers keeping your organization or program from being where you want to be? Where does the barrier lie – internally or externally? Who holds the power to put that barrier in place or to remove it? What action can be taken to begin to remove this barrier?



In this photo: EPIC

LESSON 2

<p>CORE ELEMENT GOAL</p> <p><i>Make our community farming program multi-generational by allowing parents and children to plant vegetables together</i></p>	
<p>BARRIER — What is it?</p> <p><i>Program staff is used to current program and not familiar with Empowerment Economics</i></p>	
<p>BARRIER — Is the barrier internal or external?</p> <p><i>Internal</i></p>	
<p>BARRIER — Who holds the power?</p> <p><i>Program supervisor</i></p>	
<p>ACTION — What action can be taken to remove this barrier?</p> <p><i>Share about Empowerment Economics and show how other organizations have applied Empowerment Economics for their farming programs</i></p>	

LESSON 3

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, you will:

- Identify your target population and available community assets;
- Map community assets and how they can be used to meet community needs; and
- Create an Empowerment Economics action plan for your organization or program.

INTRODUCTION

In the Empowerment Economics framework, it is understood that the effectiveness of our organizations or programs in meeting the needs of our communities relies on our ability to engage community members in every step of the planning, design, and delivery process.

Our success depends on bringing our community members to the table to first assess the needs and resources that exist within our community, then engaging them in a process to create a sustainable and equitable solution to address community needs by using these shared resources. In a traditional program or organizational design, the relationship between the designers, participants, and the community as a whole can be unbalanced in a top-down approach where the few speak for the many. Empowerment Economics changes these dynamics by giving power to participants, and the community as a whole, with designers (us and our co-workers) facilitating conversation, gaining knowledge, and building trust to help connect community resources to community needs and overall, achieve sustainable solutions driven by community members.



In this photo: Sapna NYC

One advantage of this process is the learning experience that takes place between those in our organization and program and community members. One disadvantage is a limited availability of resources to engage in this deep and time-intensive process. We need to be mindful that a community-driven approach to our work could be the barrier, but also the solution.

In this lesson, we will learn how to develop a community-driven action plan for implementing Empowerment Economics in our organization or program that leads to the use of community resources for addressing community needs.

MEETING COMMUNITY WHERE THEY ARE

To begin community-driven action planning, we must first ask ourselves “who do we want to reach?” and then develop specific outreach activities to engage and ask questions.

Answer the questions in the table below. When we take time to understand the daily lives of our community members and connection points, we are better positioned to meet them where they are, rather than where it is convenient for the organization or program.

LESSON 3

What is the community you want to reach? Is it bigger and will it require additional work? Or is it smaller, requiring less work?

Who are the community members you want to reach? Are there specific subsets of the population you want to reach (i.e. women, men, elders, children and their parents, working families, LGBTQ individuals, etc.)?

What are their daily routines? What spaces or places do they occupy regularly?

Do they engage with your organization or program? If so, when and where?

HAWAIIAN COMMUNITY ASSETS

Preparing Native Hawaiians Through the Home Ownership Process

www.hawaiiancommunity.net

In the late 90's, Blossom Feiteira and Kehaulani Filimoeatu had been waiting 30 years for their chance to become homeowners on Hawaiian Home Lands. After 3 decades on a waitlist with the State of Hawaii, their names were finally called to get a lot in a new home development on Maui, but first they had to mortgage qualify.

They gathered their paystubs, bank statements, and tax returns and joined hundreds of other Hawaiians at the Maui High School gym to meet with a bank for a mortgage loan. After 30 years of waiting, it took less than 30 minutes for the bank to tell them NO. Not enough income, no savings, poor credit — you do not qualify.

Blossom and Kehau could have easily given in to hopelessness, but instead turned their despair into opportunity. In the gym that day, they gathered other native Hawaiians who were told “no”. Everyone talked about what the bank told them. They shared how frustrated they were to see their chance quickly move out of reach.

Why, during the 30 years of waiting, had they not learned the homebuying process?

How come the State didn't tell everyone what would be required to become homeowner?

This talk story was the beginning of Blossom, Kehau, and hundreds of Hawaiian families starting Hawaiian Community Assets. The nonprofit organization would teach about homebuying and mortgages to help the more than 20,000 native Hawaiians stuck on the State's waiting list for Hawaiian Home Lands.

Together, with a handful of community members, Blossom and Kehau started their journey with a philosophy — kahua waiwai, or foundation for wealth. Kahua Waiwai espouses the basic philosophy of “A Sense of Place”. The home is viewed as a foundation (*kahua*). Upon this foundation is built the family's cultural traditions, spiritual teachings, connection to the land, social relationships, and financial assets (*Waiwai*). It is this value of the home and its surroundings that provides stability and the opportunity for families to build a secure future. Opportunities that help stabilize family life help create a more stable community. A strong foundation, if built properly, will serve generations to come.

With this philosophy grounding them, Blossom and Kehau used their experience with Hawaiian Home Lands to find the path to homeownership from a Hawaiian perspective. They met with *kupuna* (elders) to learn about traditional ways of sustaining community life. Traditional economic practices of “banking” fish through large fishponds and trading as a form of “credit” were highlighted as tools for self-sufficiency. *Olelo noeau* (stories) and values were identified and highlighted. All of these approaches were used as examples for a curriculum that lifted up the traditional Hawaiian way of life to show comparisons and



teach how to navigate the modern homebuying process. Entitled *Kahua Waiwai: Building a Foundation for Wealth*, the curriculum took the Western notion of homeownership as solely about individual wealth and gain and transformed it into the Hawaiian view of wealth as family and community well-being.

Curriculum in hand, the two women would go from home to home to teach pop-up homebuyer workshops. They would teach not only parents looking to buy a home, but their parents and adult children as well. Family financial counseling helped families address multiple social needs. Hawaiian Community Assets raised funding to give grants for down payment and mortgage loans.

In their process of helping Hawaiian families achieve family and community well-being through homeownership, Blossom and Kehau started to hear stories about discrimination their people experienced within the US market system. Together, with community members, they canvassed communities of existing homeowners to ask about their mortgage terms. They were able to determine red lining was taking place in which native Hawaiian homebuyers would be charged 2% interest more than non-Hawaiians living right across the street and with the same financial capacity.

At the same time, they learned about the community economy that was alive and well for Native Hawaiians. Families were surviving by continuing the time-honored traditions of sharing food, skills, and time. Money was being gathered and shared among families to help take care of immediate needs. In this way, the native Hawaiian community was starting down a path to create a Native Hawaiian financial institution that would function on the values and practices of past generations to create genuine, holistic wealth. It would form the foundation of a parallel economic system that would challenge the status quo and the US market system.

Hawaiian Home Lands are trust lands for the native people of Hawaii. Since the creation of Hawaiian Home Lands 100 years ago, the State of Hawaii has mismanaged the trust lands. Only 9,000 native Hawaiians have been able to qualify for a home, while more than 20,000 individuals wait for their opportunity.

CASE STUDY 3

SEAMAAC

*Improving the Neighborhood Through
Community Planning and Food Businesses*

www.seamaac.org

Community development has been a core focus for Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Association Coalition (SEAMAAC) since it was founded in 1984 in Philadelphia. SEAMAAC was founded by refugees who shared the common goal of building a stronger society through the social and economic empowerment of immigrants, refugees, and other marginalized communities.

SEAMAAC understands that engaging community members is an important aspect of community development. South Philadelphia East is one of the most culturally diverse areas of the city, but over recent years, concerns of gentrification and displacement have threatened its neighborhoods and local businesses. One of SEAMAAC's continuous efforts to prevent neighborhood displacement is through their Mifflin Square Park and Neighborhood Plan. Since 2016, SEAMAAC has worked with South Philadelphia East residents and other community organizations to prioritize projects that would not only improve the park and its surrounding neighborhoods, but also preserve the existing diverse culture and small businesses in the area. Through community conversations and focus groups, often in different languages, SEAMAAC was able to make sure that community members have input in their neighborhoods' development. SEAMAAC understands that having a voice and impact within your neighborhood helps to anchor people and give them a greater stake in the future of their community.

One of the unique programs that stemmed out of their Mifflin Square Park planning is their South Philly East Food Truck program (SophiE). SoPhiE is a seasonal program that helps local entrepreneurs share their talents with their community.

"Food is really a good component to bring people together," said Andy Toy, SEAMAAC's Communications and Development Director. "People don't always recognize their neighbors and the talents they might have. The food truck gives people a way to recognize the value of their neighbor's talents and that they're not just someone who cooks food that smells different from what they're used to," Andy added. And the sharing of unique experiences, such as breaking bread and trying new cuisines, is a great way to connect neighbors who sometimes feel they have little in common.

Since the SophiE Food Truck program started four years ago, it has been a great incubator for a number of local small businesses owners. "For some of the chefs we work with, the food truck gives them the opportunity to focus primarily on sharing their products without having to worry about all the capital that is involved," Andy described. Two of the original entrepreneurs that SEAMAAC partnered with through SophiE now have their own sushi bars and employ residents from their local community and a third opened up a restaurant earlier this year.



The SoPhiE Food Truck program allows community development from an asset-based approach rather than a deficit-based approach. Not only does it give SEAMAAC a chance to find local talent, but it also allows them to partner with other organizations and programs in their community such as their local farmer's market, Novick Farm, and Fishadelphia, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) market that also connects urban youth directly to the fishermen and women at the Jersey shore.

SEAMAAC believes in the value of the existing community. They view existing assets in their community as ever-evolving; they see it as something you can grow, instead of undo or replace. Andy described that the food truck has raised new narratives between community members from different backgrounds. There are people, who had previously avoided the Park for some time, who now see it as an asset because of the new programming (SoPhiE, as well as activities for children and Elders), care, and planning that is inclusive and welcoming to all. SoPhiE provides the opportunity for people to connect and appreciate other people's culture. "There is an underlying value for the immigrant culture that sometimes only caters to people in their own communities," Andy acknowledged. "One of our goals is to help expand the market for immigrant communities and promote all the great stuff going on. "



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