

# IMPACT REPORT

*RESULTS AND PROGRESS FROM 2018*



*Pictured: Members of Circles Orange County, FL*



## **Circles USA inspires and equips communities to end poverty and thrive.**

*This report highlights our results and progress toward this mission.*

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Circles USA works at the grassroots level through Circles chapters and locations that improve the lives of individuals moving themselves out of poverty. Our participants, called Circle Leaders, experience increased skills and income, decreased dependence on public assistance, and expanded resources and support networks. Chapters also connect people across class lines, change attitudes about poverty, and contribute to policy change.

Additionally, Circles USA advances systems change through a new initiative, Poverty Reduction Labs, and through advocacy aimed at mitigating the cliff effect.

Connected by these core values, we envision a critical mass of collaborators that reduce poverty in North America. Thank you for contributing to Circles USA's impact.



# ABOUT CIRCLES CHAPTERS

Circles USA gathers middle-income and high-income volunteers to support families in poverty. Surrounded by people who have landed jobs, negotiated a lease, or managed credit card debt, people in crisis are more equipped to achieve long-term financial stability.

While participants are navigating their way out of poverty, their successes and challenges are shared with local community leaders. The barriers that keep people in poverty are identified, discussed, and often resolved.

On average, participants who complete the program achieve a 39% increase in income after six months and a 75% increase in income after 18 months. Participants continue to increase their income even after the 18-month period.

“We had several programs and food banks in the area, but we were treating symptoms. This was the first program we’d heard of that could address underlying issues of poverty.”

— *Becky Ambrosini*  
(Circles USA Supporter  
in Connellsville, PA)

Circles USA offers support to chapters through:

- Online and in-person learning, including coaching calls, webinars, regional trainings, national conferences, and site visits
- Training materials, curricula, shared best practices, and tools such as Continuous Quality Improvement methods
- Data collection and reporting system
- Marketing materials, website support, and social media promotion
- Fundraising and development assistance

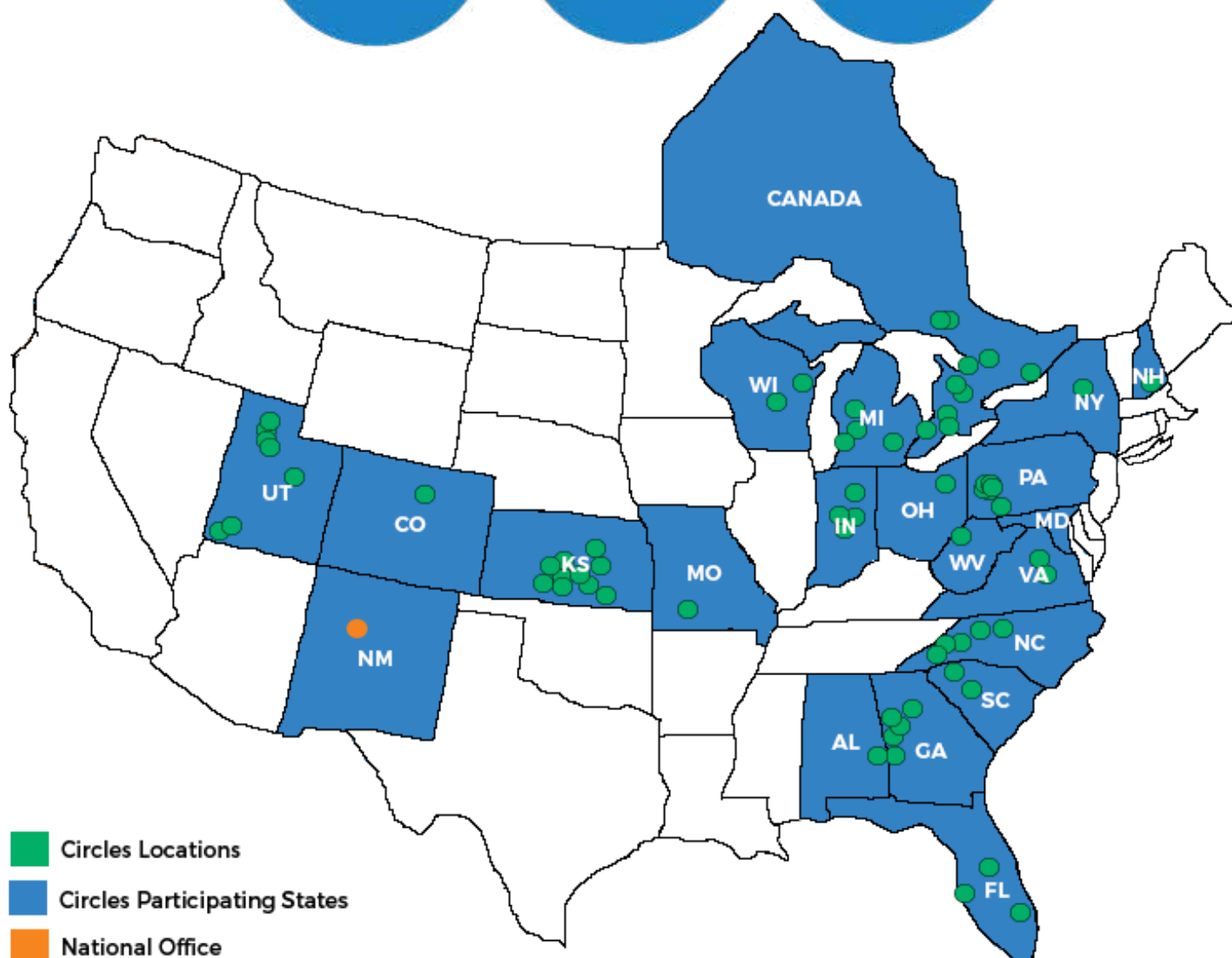
In 2018, investments from partners made it possible to begin upgrading Circles USA’s curriculum to an online platform. By leveraging video-centric classes, we can bring chapters to communities more quickly and at less cost. Expanding operations brings us closer to achieving our ambitious vision for growth: to reach 300 counties (10% of all U.S. counties). In 2019, Circles USA is developing an expansion guide to enable chapters to expand into multiple locations more effectively. Additionally, Circles USA is implementing an enhanced data system to improve analysis of our collective progress toward reducing poverty.

**IN THE UNITED STATES, CIRCLES USA IS WORKING IN 63 LOCATIONS, 20 STATES, 52 COUNTIES, AND 18 CITIES WITH POPULATIONS OVER 100,000. PLUS, THERE ARE 9 CIRCLES LOCATIONS IN THE ONTARIO PROVINCE OF CANADA.**

“I was doing everything I knew to get out of poverty. But to my shock, it became apparent that I really knew very little about any other economic class other than my own. I learned I was a master at putting out fires but inept as to how to keep them from igniting.”

— *Rebecca Lewis-Pankratz* (Circle Leader in McPherson, KS)





# 2018 RESULTS FROM CHAPTERS

## EARNED INCOME

The primary indicator of progress in Circles is an increase in earned income. On average, Circle Leaders earned 39% more income after six months, 54% more after one year, and 75% more in 18 months.



(Circles USA collected and compiled this data from our chapters across North America. In both figures, there are 1549 Circle Leaders at 12 weeks/class completion, 1067 Circle Leaders at six months, 740 Circle Leaders at 12 months, and 477 Circle Leaders at 18 months. The decrease in Circle Leaders might be less about attrition, and more about the varying number of groups joining the program at different times.)



# 2018 RESULTS FROM CHAPTERS

## EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Circles supports individuals to get jobs and earn enough income to reach economic stability. Circle Leaders made significant progress moving from unemployment to part-time and full-time work.

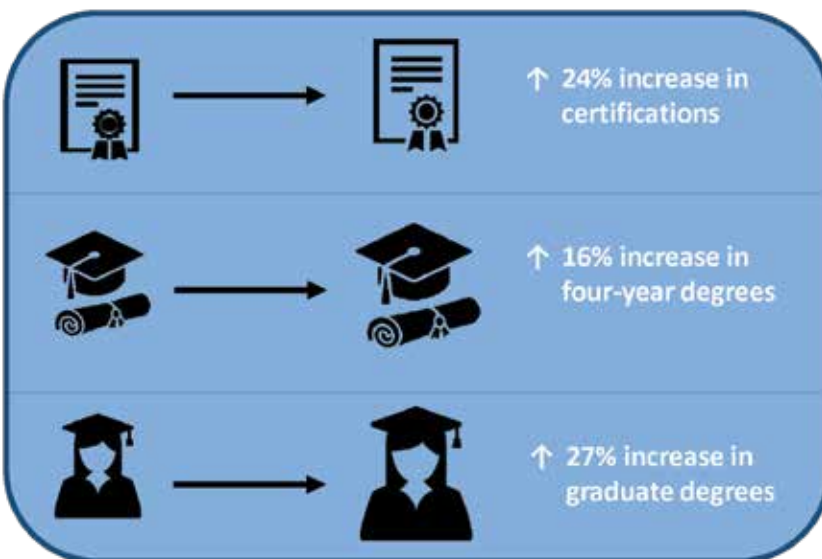
Additionally, we have started to collect data on self-employment, given how economic forecasts predict decreased traditional jobs and increased demand for entrepreneurial skills.



Intake

12 months

(This figure is based on reports from 740 Circle Leaders.)



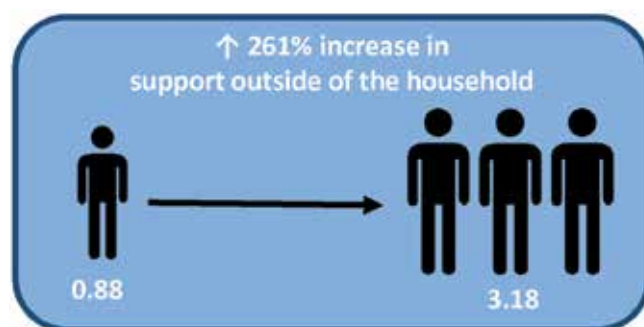
Intake

12 months

## EDUCATION

Circle Leaders often pursue education and training to earn more income. In 2018, Circle Leaders gained increases in certifications, four-year degrees, and graduate degrees.

(This figure is based on reports from 740 Circle Leaders.)



Intake

18 months

## SOCIAL CAPITAL

At intake, Circle leaders struggled to name individuals in their personal network of support. After 18 months, on average, Circle leaders could name more than three people to call on for support.

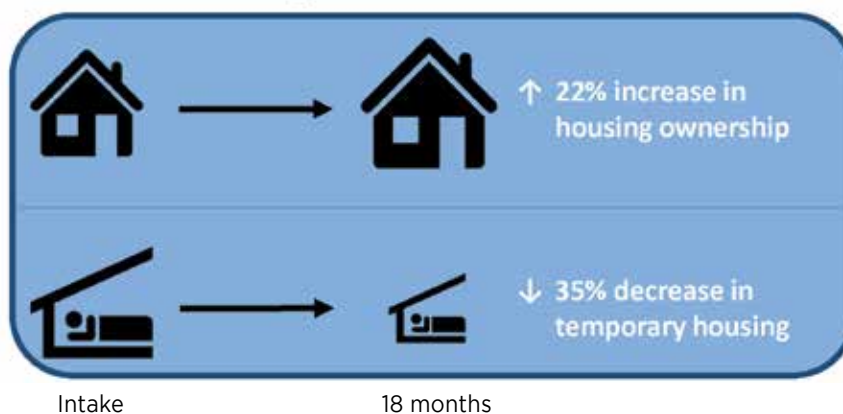
(This figure is based on reports from 477 Circle Leaders.)

# 2018 RESULTS FROM CHAPTERS

## HOUSING

Circles helps individuals gain and maintain stable housing, and supports those aiming to become homeowners. Results show increases in home ownership and decreases in temporary housing.

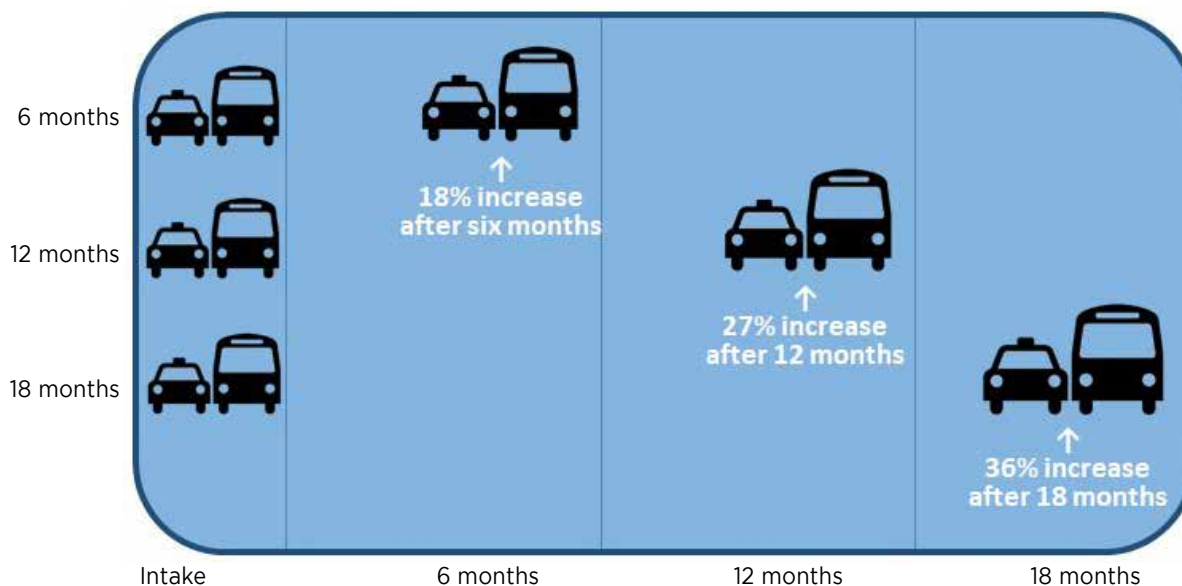
*(This figure is based on reports from 477 Circle Leaders.)*



## TRANSPORTATION

Reliable transportation equips individuals to be successful at work. Results show Circle Leaders experiencing significant increases in reliable transportation.

*(This figure is based on reports from 1,067 households at six months, 740 households at 12 months, and 477 households at 18 months.)*





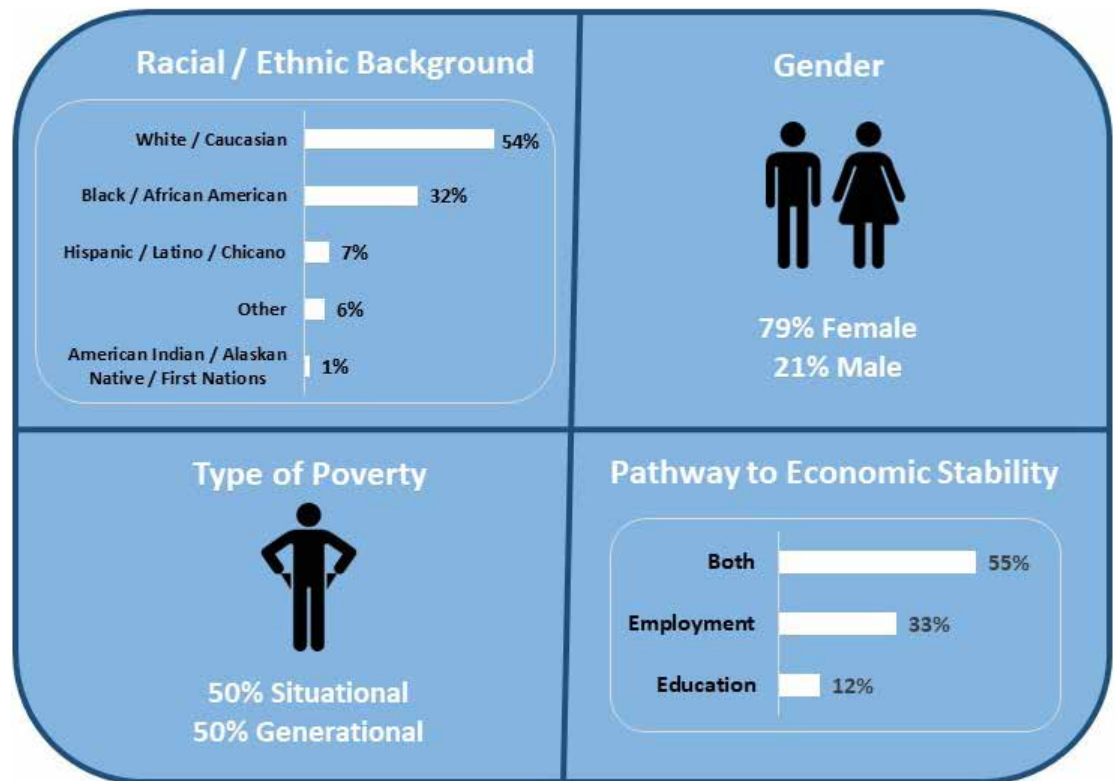
# 2018 RESULTS FROM CHAPTERS

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Circle Leaders are racially diverse, primarily female, and evenly divided between situational poverty and generational poverty. Income gains were consistent for Circle Leaders coming from generational poverty or situational poverty. The majority of Circle Leaders use both employment and education as pathways to economic stability.

"I'm very happy with my life. It's a confidence boost to do what many women can't do: I got my life together without a man."

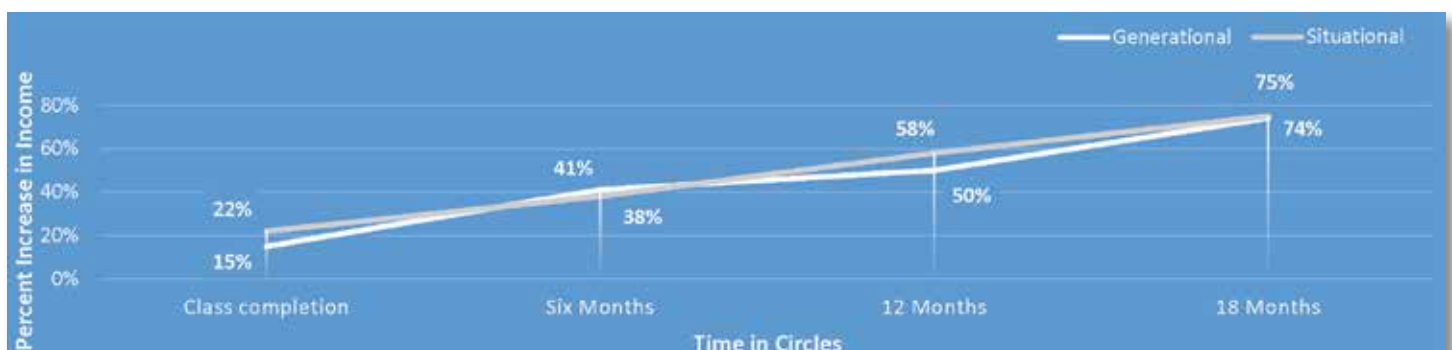
— Lola Flores  
(Circle Leader in Newaygo, MI)



(This figure is based on reports from 2,234 Circle Leaders.)

## COMPARING SITUATIONAL AND GENERATIONAL POVERTY

Results show that Circle Leaders can use the program to increase earned income, regardless of being in situational poverty or generational poverty. Comparing situational poverty and generational poverty, income gains showed nearly equivalent results.





# NEW PROGRAM: POVERTY REDUCTION LABS

Circles USA has often asked, “Why manage poverty when we can reduce it?” Last year, we established Poverty Reduction Labs to help communities collaborate across sectors to build intentional systems that advance sustainable economic programs and drastically reduce poverty rates.



Our lead partner in the Poverty Reduction Lab initiative is CQIU, a consulting firm that supports culture change within health and social care organizations through the implementation of Continuous Quality Improvement methods and tools.

Each Lab uses our Transformational Leadership curriculum and the principles of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) to develop a vision and plan for reducing poverty in the community, establishing goals, and implementing high-impact strategies.

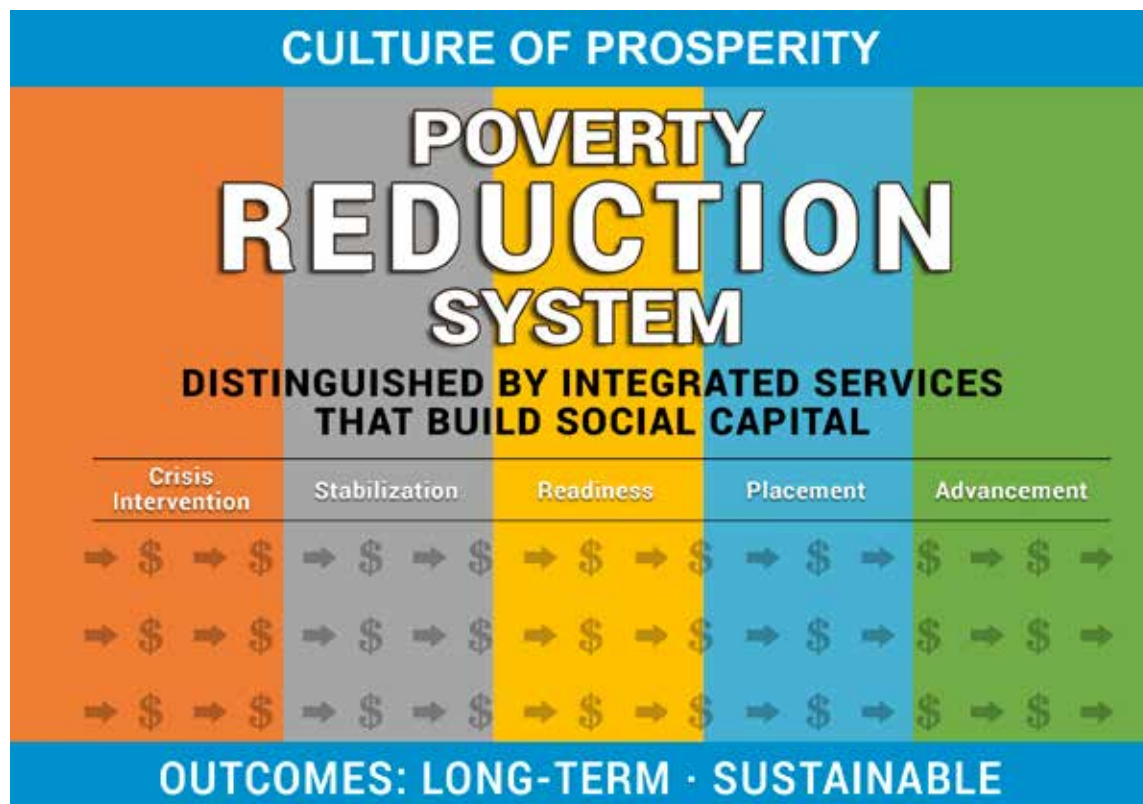
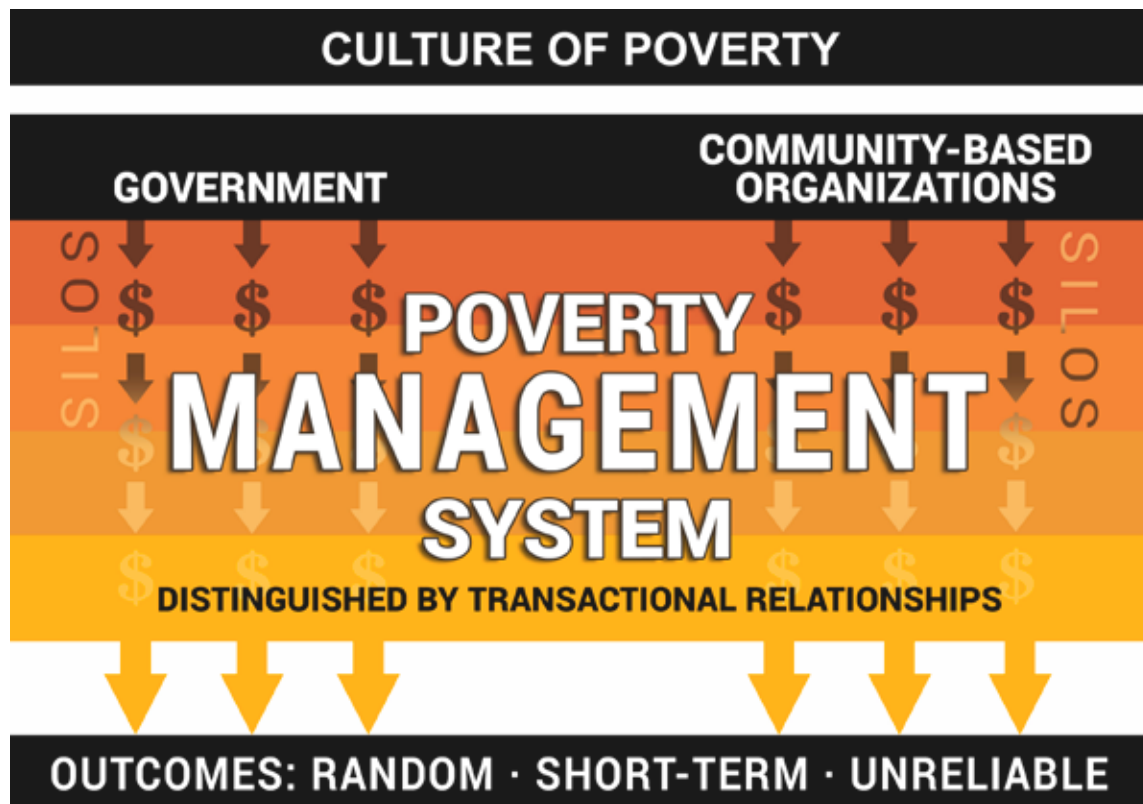
Our Transformational Leadership curriculum was developed over a 12-year period with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Its goal is to create transformational leaders who have increased capacity to end poverty. The process occurs over four stages: articulating a vision; aligning with relevant allies, including people and organizations; learning whatever is necessary in pursuit of the vision; and embedding the vision into the culture.

## Poverty Reduction Lab Locations



Poverty Reduction Labs intentionally engage leaders from business, government, education, health and human services, the civic sector, and philanthropy.

# MENTAL MODEL FOR LABS



# UPDATE: MITIGATING THE CLIFF EFFECT

Circles USA identified the cliff effect as one of the primary barriers to economic self-sufficiency. The cliff effect occurs when a family begins to earn above the limits set by the state and becomes ineligible for subsidies on food, housing, child care, and other benefits. For five years, Circles USA has been conducting research and developing tools to better inform individuals in poverty and policy makers.

In 2018, in conjunction with New Mexico First's legislative platform, Circles USA completed a commissioned report with case studies and policy proposals for the state of New Mexico.

## TOOLS

Circles USA and our team of consultants have conceptualized the following tools.

For families, the *Cliff Effect Planning Tool* could estimate losses in state and federal assistance programs in relation to income increases. Therefore, individuals can more effectively plan for losses in benefits while they continue to generate more earned income, in order to bridge the gap to economic independence.

For policy makers, the *Cliff Effect Mitigation Cost Effectiveness Calculator* could predict how a program or policy change will affect the target population. For example, childcare assistance rules could be changed to pro-rated subsidies more evenly as people increase their income, but under what conditions? Would coaching and/or an information campaign be needed for a group to take advantage of the change and pursue opportunities for more earned income?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For Poverty Reduction Labs or Circles chapters interested in mitigating the cliff effect, Circles USA suggests the following process.

- Deputize one person affiliated with Circles as the project leader. A dedicated staff position can coordinate development of the tools, fundraising, and advocacy efforts in your state.
- Identify an ally within your local Department of Human Services. The key to creating these tools is having a government leader who appreciates Circles USA's mission and is willing to participate in conversations about assistance program formulas.
- Engage a professional coding team within your state to program the tools. A local coding team can be a technical ally to explain what is needed to state government agencies and may be able to leverage resources from the regional software development community.

Please contact us at [circles@circlesusa.org](mailto:circles@circlesusa.org) for an initial phone conference about using these recommendations and finding technical assistance.

# GET INVOLVED

## To reach Circles USA's national office:

Phone: 888-232-9285

Email: [circles@circlesusa.org](mailto:circles@circlesusa.org)

Website: [circlesusa.org](http://circlesusa.org)

Facebook: [facebook.com/circlesusa](https://facebook.com/circlesusa)

We invite you to join one of Circles USA's national advisory teams. These teams will advance key subjects to benefit our entire network, such as strategizing about how chapters can expand into multiple locations, exploring prospects for fundraising, and advocating for mitigations to the cliff effect. Send us an email at [circles@circlesusa.org](mailto:circles@circlesusa.org) requesting a description of our new teams. We look forward to working together!



*2018 Circles Conference*

## 2019 CIRCLES CONFERENCE:

October 14th-17th, 2019  
in Greenville, SC

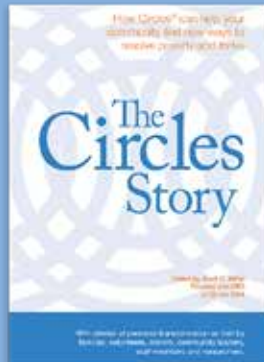
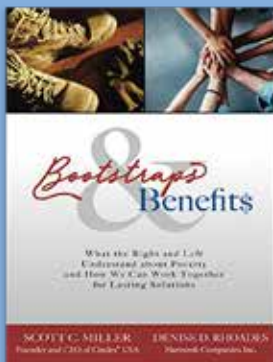
Co-hosted by Circles Greenville County in  
partnership with SHARE and Buncombe  
Street United Methodist Church

## eStore is now open!

To access, contact: [gena@circlesusa.org](mailto:gena@circlesusa.org)



Circles literature can be purchased on Amazon





# OUR TEAM

## CIRCLES USA LEADERSHIP TEAM



*Left to right:*

**Scott Miller**, Founder (Albuquerque, NM)

**Gena Atcher**, National Membership Coordinator (Marshall, MN)

**Jamie Haft**, Executive Director (Albuquerque, NM)

**Kamatara Johnson**, Chief Learning Officer (Albuquerque, NM)

**Courtney Cowan**, Information Systems and Design Manager (Lowell, AR)

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**Nishita Morris**, Poverty Reduction Lab Consultant and Founder, CQIU (Athens, GA)

**Jeannie Chaffin**, Poverty Reduction Lab Consultant (Washington, DC)

**Sherri Nee**, Curriculum Development (Portland, OR)

**Chris Tinney**, Communications Consultant (Las Vegas, NV)

**Jen Nibley**, Expansion Advisor and Director of Arrive Utah (Provo, UT)

**Lisa Doyle-Parsons**, Coach for Circles USA Chapters (Parkersburg, WV)

**Jim Wagner**, Copy Editor (Albuquerque, NM)

**Janet Carl**, Poverty Reduction Lab Consultant and Grant Writer (Grinnell, IA)

**Robert Karp**, Strategic Planning and Partnership Development (Milwaukee, WI)

## Circles USA Funders



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**Board and staff at  
February 2019 meeting  
in Albuquerque, NM**

*Front row, left to right:*

Joan Kuriansky  
Vince Gonzales  
Jamie Haft  
Kamatara Johnson  
Scott Miller

*Back row, left to right:*

Jim Masters  
Gena Atcher  
Jennifer Pelling

*Not pictured:*  
Courtney Cowan  
John Wilson

Circles chapters  
from Michigan and  
Utah with some  
staff and board  
members at our  
2018 Conference  
co-hosted by  
Circles Greater  
Pittsburgh

