



INSIGHT[®]
CENTER FOR COMMUNITY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Envisioning A Better Future for Working Families:

The Self-Sufficiency Standard in Mississippi

About the Insight Center

The Insight Center for Community Economic Development, formerly the National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC), is a national research, consulting, and legal organization dedicated to building economic health in disenfranchised communities. The Insight Center's multidisciplinary approach utilizes a wide array of community economic development strategies including promoting industry-focused workforce development, building individual and community assets, establishing the link between early care and education and economic development, and advocating for the adoption of the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* as a measurement of income adequacy. For more information visit: www.insightccd.org.

About the National Economic Security Initiative

The Insight Center was a founding partner of the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (FESS), an innovative, nationwide effort to promote proven strategies that help low-income families reach economic self-sufficiency. Today, we work to expand this movement nationally, and lead the California arm, known as Californians for Economic Security (CFES), a coalition with more than 400 members. In 2008, we launched the California Elder Economic Security Initiative™ (Cal-EESI), which extends this work to help retired, older adults age with dignity and economic well-being.

Susan E. Smith is the principal author of this report. The following staff members played instrumental roles in producing this report: Lauren Berkman assisted with conducting the interviews; Anagha Dange assisted with analyzing the interviews and writing; Jenny Chung, Susie Suafai, and Lori Warren; edited the report; and Esther Polk and LaVerne Gardner formatted the report.

Acknowledgements

The Insight Center would like to thank the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta for their outstanding leadership on the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* project in Mississippi and for identifying local leaders to interview for this report. We would also like to thank the Children's Defense Fund Southern Regional Office for their leadership in helping to educate communities about the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* and for connecting us to local organizations to interview.

We want to express our sincere appreciation to the twenty-four leaders who took the time out of their busy schedules to be interviewed for this report. Without their assistance, this report would not have been possible. A list of those leaders can be found in Appendix B.

Finally, we would like to thank the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for their generous support of this project.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Methodology	2
Interview Findings	3
Awareness of the Self-Sufficiency Standard	3
Current and Past Uses of the Self-Sufficiency Standard	4
Future Uses of the Self-Sufficiency Standard	4
Challenges Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard	8
Conclusions and Recommendations	9
Appendix A	12
Appendix B	14

Introduction & Background

The *Self-Sufficiency Standard* (*the Standard*) measures how much income is needed for working families to cover their most basic expenses: housing, food, child care, health care, transportation, and state and federal taxes. Drawing from widely-recognized, public data sources such as the US Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Housing, the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* varies by family composition and county of residence.¹ First developed in 1995 by Dr. Diana Pearce as part of a project for Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), the *Standard* is an organizing and program development tool for agencies across the country and provides a more accurate metric of basic needs than the often-cited, but outdated Federal Poverty Guidelines.

A recent study found that *one out of every three non-elderly households in Mississippi does not have enough income to meet their most basic needs*, as defined by the *Self-Sufficiency Standard*.² This group of struggling Mississippians is neither small nor marginal, but rather represents a substantial and diverse proportion of the state. It includes married couples with children, full-time working parents, men, women, and representatives from all racial and ethnic groups in the state. The scope of the problem is so large that it constitutes a crisis.

The question is: what can be done to help Mississippi families move along a path toward economic security? What programmatic and policy advocacy strategies are local leaders spearheading to enable families to reach economic stability, and how can tools like the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* strengthen existing efforts?

In 2009, the Insight Center for Community Economic Development began a project, *Building Economic Security in Mississippi*, to expand the capacity of local organizations to develop, maintain, and engage a statewide coalition of diverse stakeholders around family economic security, using the *Standard* as an organizing framework. Specifically, we partnered with the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta (ECD), the organization which has housed the *Standard* in Mississippi since 2003, and the Children's Defense Fund Southern Regional Office (CDF), an organization which leads several effective statewide and regional initiatives to reduce childhood poverty in the region.

Phase I of *Building Economic Security in Mississippi* included the following key steps which were completed in 2009 in partnership with ECD, CDF, and WOW. Together, we:

1. Created a *Building Economic Security in Mississippi* Advisory Committee of local leaders;
2. Conducted a statewide scan and qualitative interviews of 23 local organizations helping families move toward economic security to assess their usage of the *Self-Sufficiency Standard*;
3. Updated and released a 2009 *Self-Sufficiency Standard* reflecting the current costs of meeting basic needs for families in each county of Mississippi;

¹Diana Pearce has calculated the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* using the same methodology for 37 states and the District of Columbia. WOW continues to lead national advocacy around adopting the Self-Sufficiency Standard in Washington, D.C.

² Dr. Diana Pearce, Center for Women's Welfare, School of Social Work, University of Washington, *Overlooked and Undercounted, Struggling to Make Ends Meet in Mississippi* (2009). http://www.mepconline.org/images/admin/spotedit/attach/0/ECD_nb.pdf; and <http://www.selfsufficiencyStandard.org/docs/Mississippi%20Demographic%202009.pdf>.

4. Increased the capacity of local organizations to use and promote the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* throughout the state;
5. Produced *Overlooked and Undercounted: Struggling to Make Ends Meet in Mississippi*, the study referenced above, which details the number and demographic profile of families living on incomes below the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* in Mississippi; and
6. Increased the visibility of the *Standard*, so that local stakeholders now have a better understanding of what it actually takes families to make ends meet in Mississippi.

By providing new tools, training materials, messages, and policy and programmatic consultation in coordination with our national partner, WOW, the project is helping local practitioners, advocates, and policymakers become aware of and begin to integrate the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* into local programs and policy development. For, in order to ultimately help families reach economic stability, we first need to have an accurate and realistic understanding of how much it actually takes to cover basic needs in Mississippi.

Over the next few years, we hope to strengthen the capacity of local organizations to integrate the *Standard* into local practices and policies and build an effective statewide coalition unified around the goal of economic security for all Mississippi residents.

Based on an analysis from interviews of twenty-three organizations across Mississippi, this report assesses the current application—and the potential future application—of the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* in Mississippi. It should be noted from the outset, however, that until the creation of ECD's Mississippi Economic Policy Center (MEPC) in 2007, ECD did not have the resources or staff capacity to lead a statewide effort to educate organizations about the *Standard* and help them integrate it into their work. The creation of MEPC, combined with a recent investment from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, now makes the application of the *Standard* more likely to be realized in the future. The release of the *Standard* in 2009, along with the 2009 demographic study on people living below the *Standard*, have catalyzed much more interest in the tool, largely due to a successful outreach strategy by ECD. Mississippi leaders are now well-positioned to take the next steps to better measure and eventually address poverty in the state.

This report proceeds as follows. Section I discusses the research methodology. Section II summarizes the interview findings, including a discussion of: the awareness of the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* within Mississippi, current and potential future use of the *Standard*, and challenges associated with integrating the tool into local programs and policies. Section III concludes with recommendations on how to use the *Standard* to build a coalition united around family economic stability in Mississippi.

Overall, we found that policymakers, advocates, service providers and funders all see tremendous potential in the Standard's ability to help improve the lives of working families in Mississippi, today and in the future.

Methodology

The Insight Center interviewed leaders from twenty-three organizations in order to assess familiarity, current use, and the potential of future adoption of the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* in Mississippi programs and policies. A secondary purpose was to educate local stakeholders unfamiliar with the *Standard* about its potential so that these organizations would be informed and eager to use the *Standard* and join a new self-sufficiency movement in Mississippi.

With consultation from ECD and CDF, the Insight Center identified organizations from across the state which had family support programs or policy initiatives. We selected organizations to interview from each region of

the state (Capital/River, Delta, Gulf Coast, Hills, and Pines) and sampled different types of organizations (service organizations, advocacy organizations, public agencies, foundations, research institutions, and the private sector). Most of the organizations interviewed were supported by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation so that the research findings could also inform Kellogg's grant making and help to improve organizational practices over time. The interviewees were mostly executive directors of their organizations or other top-level management.

The 23 organizations included:

- 7 non-profit direct service providers,
- 4 non-profit advocacy organizations,
- 2 non-profit advocacy *and* direct service organizations,
- 4 public agencies,
- 3 research institutions,
- 2 foundations, and
- 1 investment firm.

We asked questions related to:

- Organizational policies and programs,
- Current use of the *Self-Sufficiency Standard*,
- Potential future uses of the *Self Sufficiency Standard* within their organizations,
- Potential future uses of the *Standard* across similar organizations in the state and at the state and local legislative levels, and
- Challenges in integrating the *Standard* in programs and policies.

A template of the questions can be found in Appendix A. To encourage an open dialogue, remarks are not attributed to specific individuals. Rather, an overall list of the interviewees and their organizations is attached in Appendix B.

Interview Findings

Awareness of the Self-Sufficiency Standard

Of the 23 organizations interviewed, only three organizations were using the *Standard* in their work today. One organization used the 2003 version of the *Standard*, but then later found it outdated; two organizations were familiar with the *Self-Sufficiency Standard*, ten organizations had heard of the *Standard*, but did not know how it worked or what it really was, and 6 were neither familiar with nor aware of the *Standard*. While several organizations provided guidance to ECD when ECD first released the *Standard* in 2003 and others heard about it more recently in the planning around the 2009 release of the *Standard*, *an overall finding was that Mississippi organizations sampled were generally not that familiar with or using the Self-Sufficiency Standard today. This is not particularly surprising, however, since, until recently, there was not significant support to launch a statewide educational campaign about the Standard.* As a result, the interview process, itself, became more interactive with local stakeholders learning about the tool, and brainstorming how they could apply it in the future to their programs and advocacy work to help working families.

Current and Past Use of the Self-Sufficiency Standard

Currently, ECD, the Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative, and the National Community Tax Coalition –policy-oriented organizations in Mississippi – use the *Standard* for advocacy, public education, and/or fund development. As one child care advocate explained,

“We use it as an informational tool to show why child care subsidies are so important. When pressing for more money to be put into subsidies, we can talk about the difference it makes and give the message that child care is key to helping people be able to work. Without subsidies, parents are not able to cover their other basic needs.”

ECD uses the *Standard* to demonstrate the need for more funding for workforce development programs, so that families can be trained to enter industries that ultimately pay self-sufficiency wages. ECD has also used the *Standard* data in their reports, such as ECD’s *Broadening the Base: Strengthening Mississippi’s Working Families, Businesses and Economy Through Strong Child Care Systems*, which highlighted unspent TANF funds and advocated that those dollars be redirected toward workforce development and child care programs. ECD has used the *Standard* to evaluate the impact of their programs to measure, for example, if their commercial lending helped a business pay self-sufficiency level wages. Finally, ECD cites the data in the *Standard* in oral testimony to the state legislature to support its overall policy work.

While National Community Tax Coalition uses the Federal Poverty Guidelines for research and advocacy “to skim the environment and show where people are at,” they use the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* “when it makes sense to paint a more detailed picture of low-income folks and show where the gap lies.”

“If the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* was tied to outcomes of the programs we fund, it could show if the organization is meeting its goals.”

Despite these examples, one research and advocacy organization concluded, “the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* has not yet affected advocacy in a meaningful way” in Mississippi.

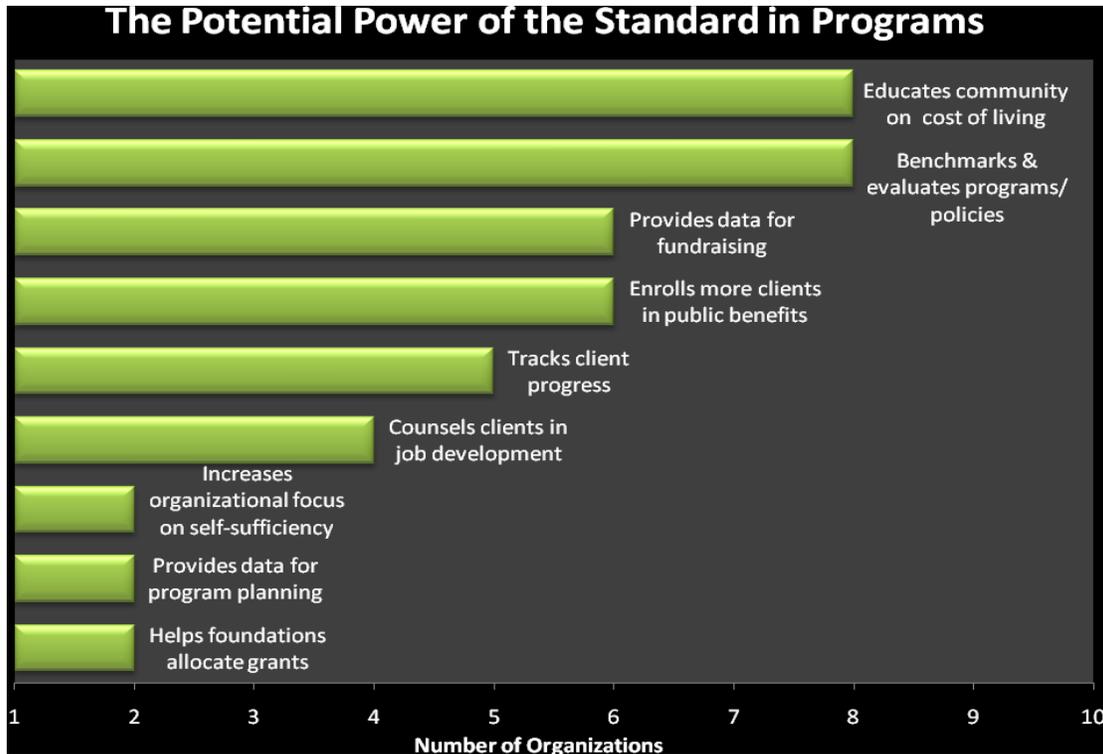
Future Uses of the Standard

The non-profit organizations interviewed, be they advocates *or* direct service providers, reported that the *Standard* is capable of supporting the work of any organization working with low-income communities and families since it is a very valuable research and data source. The respondents were remarkably similar in their perception and understanding of possible uses of the *Standard*. This was reflected in their responses to the questions both on advantages and on challenges to adopting the *Self-Sufficiency Standard*. The only difference was the end use: either in public policy or programmatically. For example, comparing the two largest groups of organizations i.e. direct service providers and advocacy organizations, the advocacy organization saw the *Standard* as a data and research tool to promote and back advocacy campaigns. It provides, as one leader put it, “a stronger base to make the case for family and work supports when talking to legislators, giving us an extra leg to stand on.” Similarly, service providers also saw the *Standard* as a research and data tool, but for program planning and expansion. As one workforce development agency leader explained, she envisioned using the *Standard* “to expand, establish, and retool existing programs.”

Another example of similarity was that the advocacy organizations saw the *Standard* as a tool to raise public awareness of the benefits they can access through federal, state, and local programs generally. Similarly, the direct service providers saw the same purpose of the *Standard* but, from their lens, to increase enrollment of their direct client base in these programs.

1. The Power of the Standard in Programs

The interviewees were asked to discuss what would happen if the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* were integrated within their organizations' programs. Leaders elaborated on a variety of benefits. General themes listed from most frequent to least frequent response are summarized in the bar-graph below.



Using the *Standard* to benchmark and evaluate programs was one of the most common future applications of the *Standard* in programs among interviewees. As one organization which makes sub-grants explained:

“If the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* was tied to outcomes of the programs we fund, it could show if the organization is meeting its goals and whether their programs are successful... the measure would show if the programs are getting people to self-sufficiency.”

Not only did the interviewees envision using the *Standard* to measure the impact of their work, but they also reported that it could help them gain access to new sources of funding because it quantifies a population that service providers heretofore could only discuss anecdotally: families with incomes above the official poverty line, but below what it takes to make ends meet. Some respondents cited that they could use the *Standard* to demonstrate unmet needs of this population in grant applications. Leaders also expressed that the tool could improve organizations' capacity in program planning and organizational strategic planning, enabling them to decide on core priorities moving forward by answering the following kinds of questions: *will this new program, subsidy, or initiative lower the dollar amount a person needs to be self-sufficient in our community? Will it increase their earning power over time so they can earn self-sufficiency level wages? Do our current programs actually help people reach economic stability, as measured by the Standard? How do we measure program impact?*

“The *Standard* would change the whole face of what we do, if it became adopted... The *Self-Sufficiency Standard*, simply put, would change the way people look at receiving and giving assistance”.

Other direct service providers emphasized the *Standard's* utility in areas such as budgeting, community education, increasing awareness, financial literacy, and empowerment. As one direct service leader explained:

“I'd like to use the *Standard* to teach clients what it really takes to 'make it'. It would be a great tool for people who don't know of the *Self-Sufficiency Standard*, so they could see the different components of a budget and gauge their income accordingly. It would help both clients and our staff.”

Like any other tool, the more familiar interviewees were with the *Standard*, the deeper their understanding of it and, in turn, the more benefit they expected from it. However, **even people unfamiliar with the Standard immediately saw its potential to improve programs once it was explained to them during the interviews.** And, all of those interviewed could see potential uses, irrespective of their prior knowledge of the *Self-Sufficiency Standard*.

“The *Standard* helps families and advocates see beyond the day-to-day to the implications and see a different paradigm, the big picture, like what happens when a child loses health insurance because his parent makes two dollars over the eligibility for CHIP?”

As another leader powerfully concluded:

“The Standard would change the whole face of what we do, if it became adopted or an accepted practice. The *Self-Sufficiency Standard* would open people's eyes for those who don't believe there are hungry people next door. And for those who may be embarrassed, or ashamed that they'd need assistance, now they'd know how much it takes. The *Self-Sufficiency Standard*, simply put, would change the way people look at receiving and giving assistance”.

2. The Power of the Standard in Policy

Advocates, policymakers, funders, and researchers alike all saw potential in the *Standard* to reframe the way poverty is measured and addressed in Mississippi. Over time, the *Standard* could even have an impact on the political landscape by exposing unmet needs, identifying target wages for families, and expanding services to

populations not considered “poor” by government agencies. Respondents reported that the *Standard* could help build greater public support and, over time, political will to create policies that support working families.

Most of the interviewees stated that they wanted to be a part of any statewide coalition dedicated to family economic security, and receive training on the *Standard*. Many who did not have previous understanding or exposure to the *Standard* immediately understood the concept and its applications for public policy. As one advocate summarized:

“The *Standard* helps families and advocates see beyond the day-to-day to the implications and see a different paradigm, the big picture, like what happens when a child loses health insurance because his parent makes two dollars over the eligibility for CHIP [Children’s Health Insurance Program]?”

One state administrator thought the *Standard* could be used to make the case for more federal funding to Mississippi and indicated the importance of sharing this information with the Mississippi Congressional Delegation.

“There is a fertile land of advocacy in Mississippi.”

Not only were many of the state leaders interested in joining a coalition around economic security, but they also thought that the *Standard* could be an effective organizing tool in and of itself because it includes the cost of food, housing, transportation, child care, and health care. Leaders thought that the *Standard* could catalyze groups from these different sectors to work collaboratively for the first time around a common framework of economic security. As one leader explained, “our assessment shows that most coalitions are not talking to each other. They are very fragmented. This could help bring people together.” In the words of another advocate: “the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* cries out to be used in a collaborative model!”

Since the *Standard* is county-specific, policy leaders thought that it could be used to advocate with strategic lawmakers within their districts, showing the impact of a particular childcare, healthcare, housing, food, or transportation policy on their constituency. **The most common policy areas cited were child care and workforce development.** Several leaders said that the high costs of child care demonstrated through the *Standard* can and should be used to make the case for more child care subsidies and to argue for increased state reimbursement rates for child care providers. It could also help show the return on such investments in lowering costs for public programs over the long run. “By helping families become more self-sufficient,” one leader said, “you impact the community *and* decrease the need for programs like Head Start in later years.”

“The *Self-Sufficiency Standard* will make our policy makers more aware and think in terms of a metric when setting or changing policy.”

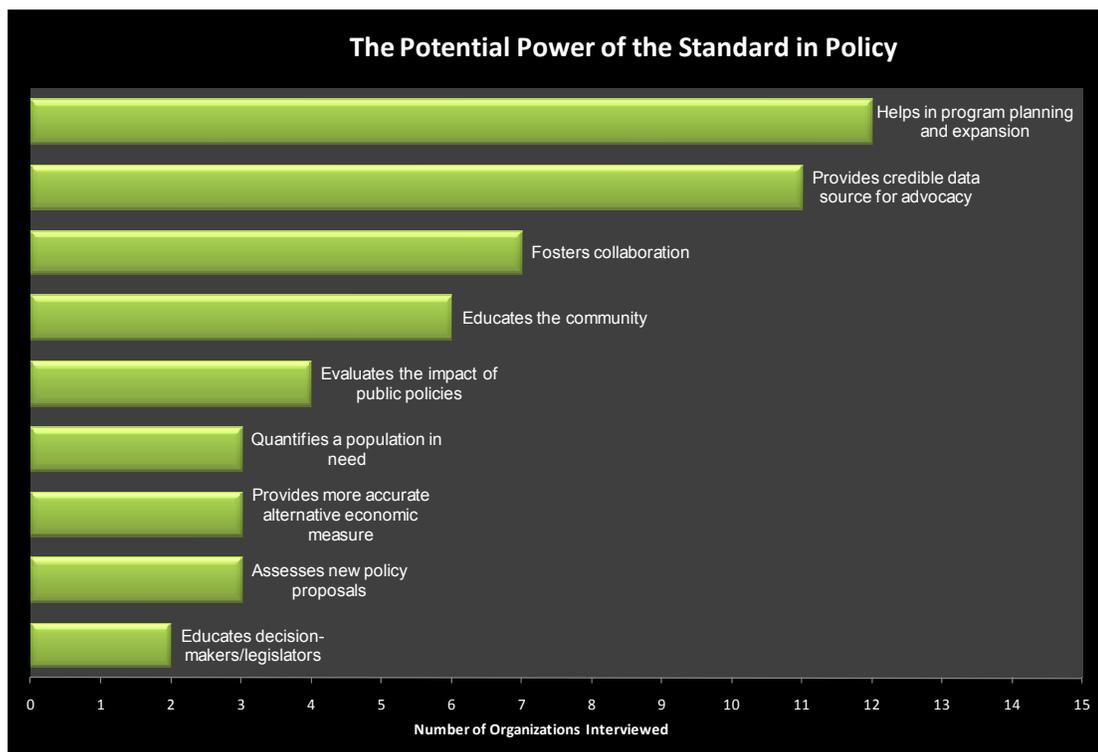
Similarly, leaders in workforce development said that the *Standard* provides a target wage for students and job training programs since it includes all of the basic costs a family faces. One education leader anticipated:

“If it was integrated into the colleges, it would better help students make the connection between wages and their quality of life. It could also benchmark if students are helped by participation in the training and education programs and better understand which programs need to continue and those that don’t.”

Another leader in the area of workforce explained that the *Standard* can also be used as an economic development tool to identify:

- How many jobs pay above the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* in Mississippi,
- Where the quality jobs are located within the state, and
- Which sectors and occupations actually provide self-sufficiency wage jobs, so that public investments and tax incentives can be directed accordingly.

Once target wages are identified, the *Standard* can also be used as an organizing tool to support community benefit campaigns for higher wages. The following bar-chart summarizes commonly cited future applications of the *Standard* in policies.



Challenges Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard

Despite the widespread enthusiasm for the *Standard*, organizational leaders also recognized that there are some significant challenges associated with adopting the *Standard*. **The most frequently cited challenge from both the policy and programmatic lens was a lack of awareness and education about the *Standard*.** Interviewees cited the need for more education about the *Standard*, both individually and in workshops: “This past Spring I attended a meeting with ECD and Insight Center about the *Standard*. It was the first time that someone had sat down with me to explain what the *Standard* is. Learning about the *Standard* in this way was very helpful.”

The most common concern among policy leaders and advocates was **political resistance** to adopting the *Standard* statewide. The political climate within Mississippi is seen as reinforcing the old and entrenched ways of thinking and prejudices. Some of the political factors that contribute to this climate are the fear of losing appeal to the business community, fear of resistance to raising wages, the weakness of unions, and

the negative perception of welfare recipients and public benefits within the state. As one stakeholder explained, poverty tends to be seen as a problem of “‘the other’: Delta Black and rural White.” Another leader summarized the views of others by saying that the problem lies in “the history of systematic injustice and the great divide between the rich and the poor” in Mississippi.

There also seemed to be a ‘chicken and egg’ scenario, whereby organizations said that they may be reluctant to, or simply unable to adopt the *Standard*, until the public and philanthropic sectors have adopted it. “The Federal Poverty Line is **the Standard** right now,” explained one leader, “until the government bites the bullet, it’s going to be very hard to have the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* recognized and become the conversational currency”. At the same time, however, government and foundation leaders may want to see organizations finding value and using the *Standard* on the ground before making it a widespread policy.

Several leaders also cited **fiscal concerns** in terms of **staff training** on a new tool and **staff capacity** to serve more people under the *Standard*, versus the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or other less accurate measures. In a resource-challenged state, the implication is that if the *Standard* were adopted, it would necessarily be used to expand eligibility for programs and therefore be a strain on state and local resources. Related, interviewees discussed that adopting the *Standard* could conflict with existing state and federal guidelines and should therefore be addressed at the federal level, not at the state level. A number of organizations in the sample depended on public dollars, so there was even some apprehension about ‘going it alone’ in using the tool for the fear of losing whatever limited resources that were available in case the *Standard* was not officially accepted.

Finally, there was also concern about **local ownership of the initiative**. The state is very conscious and sensitive about its standing in the context of poverty and income levels of its residents. Any attempt to address poverty and income issues within the state ought not to be seen as preaching or thrust upon by outsiders. Otherwise, it could be perceived as “just another thing that makes Mississippi look bad.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

The local stakeholders interviewed for this report had a strong sense of both the power of the *Standard* to reform programs and policies in Mississippi, as well as the significant challenges in doing so. This research, along with the other components of this overall project, has provided a road map for the next steps on how to build a Mississippi Family Economic Security Coalition statewide. The key will be getting members united, and getting them to use the *Standard* as the conversational currency amongst themselves and within their own organizations. Once this commonality is established, opportunities for members to collaborate, “cross pollinate,” and build a political agenda can begin. These new opportunities could include:

- Increasing access to resources and services for coalition members’ constituents,
- Linking programs and services that help families and individuals progress towards economic security,
- Providing technical assistance to one another in integrating the *Standard* into their programs,
- Partnering on fundraising and advocacy efforts, and
- Collaborating, over time, to advocate for policy changes that will benefit all Mississippi families.

The recommendations for moving forward stem from both the opportunities and challenges of integrating and adopting the *Standard* in Mississippi. The recommendations fall into three categories:

- 1) Education and Training,

- 2) Building a Coalition and Political Will, and
- 3) Addressing Cost Concerns.

It should be stated from the outset, however, to fully implement these recommendations, more investment is needed in local organizations to strengthen their capacity to move forward with this labor-intensive work.

Education and Training

As mentioned, the number one barrier cited for using the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* in Mississippi was lack of awareness. Therefore, **more on-the-ground education and training—individually, at conferences, and in small groups—are needed** for organizations to understand the *Standard* and integrate it into their programs and policy advocacy strategies.

Specifically, the following education and training steps would help move the *Standard* forward in Mississippi:

1. Identify a lead training organization (e.g. ECD).
2. Educate stakeholders and the general public on why an alternative measure is needed (e.g. flaws of the Federal Poverty Guidelines), how the *Standard* is a more realistic and meaningful index, and the benefits and opportunities that can flow from adopting the *Standard*.
3. Begin to create local ownership amongst coalition members and the wider circle of stakeholders by getting respected local leaders to start using the *Standard* and speaking out about its benefits publicly through trainings, conferences, webinars and individual meetings.
4. Provide models of how the *Standard* has been used by other conservative states, ideally also in the South.

Building A Coalition and Political Will

Among policy leaders and advocates, political resistance was the most commonly cited challenge to statewide adoption of the *Standard*. Related, several leaders expressed that organizations did not collaborate to build coalitions across related sectors.

Next steps to build a coalition and greater political acceptance over time include:

1. Identify an organization to take the lead on building a coalition (e.g. CDF).
2. Set short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals around adopting the *Standard* among local organizations, foundations, and, over time, public agencies.
3. Organize holistically—using both a grass-roots approach and official involvement—to build and sustain a consistent campaign *across* sectors. This includes:
 - a. Educating and building relationships with public administrators and officials on how the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* can fit into existing state programs, rather than needing to “reinvent the wheel” and
 - b. Partnering with well-respected and recognized advocacy champions who can effectively deliver the message to legislators.
4. Use common language when speaking about the *Self-Sufficiency Standard*, so that legislators do not get confused by different measurements cited.

5. Differentiate this campaign from others by emphasizing it is built on “hard data”, with credible sources, especially when talking to policymakers.

Addressing Cost Concerns

Related to the political challenges, leaders expressed concerns about the fiscal impact of adopting and integrating the *Standard* in programs or policies. In order to be credibly received, the coalition must address these concerns. Logical first steps include:

1. Engage foundations, public sector leaders, and policymakers in advising and participating in the coalition early on, so that these leaders buy into the framework from the beginning, and possibly support it as the work moves forward.
2. Understand and build awareness around the cost of integrating and adopting the *Standard* at the organizational level.
3. Demonstrate how the *Standard* could help residents transition off of public benefits and lead to self-sufficiency—thereby saving the state money in the long-run.
4. Demonstrate how the *Standard* could benefit the Mississippi economy by identifying local, growing employment sectors which lead to self-sufficiency wages and train residents to enter those sectors.

While implementing these recommendations will require significant commitment, time, and capacity building of lead organizations over several years, the seeds have been planted to move forward with a holistic and systemic response to the plight of the one out of three households in Mississippi struggling to make ends meet. The time to act is now.

Appendix A: Sample Interview Protocol

Background Information (clients and programs)

1. Name
2. Type of organization
3. Services provided
4. Who is your primary client population?
 - a. General assistance
 - b. People with disabilities
 - c. TANF recipients
 - d. Underemployed
 - e. Unemployed
 - f. Other
5. What would self-sufficiency look like for your clients?
6. How many programs does your organization have?
7. Do you require an income eligibility guideline for your programs?
8. If so, which one?
9. Do you use that guideline in any other capacity (e.g. to benchmark progress)?
10. Which poverty standard do you currently use to conduct your advocacy work?
 - a. Your direct service work?
 - b. Why do you use that standard?

Familiarity, Use & Perception of the Self-Sufficiency Standard

11. Are you familiar with the Self-Sufficiency Standard?
 - a. Mississippi 2003 Standard?
 - b. If yes, when did you first hear about the Self-Sufficiency Standard?
 - c. What do you know about it?
12. Why have you used/not used it in your work?
13. Would you use the Self-Sufficiency Standard as an alternative in your work?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Why not?
14. Are there areas of your work where the Self-Sufficiency Standard would not apply to your clients?
 - a. What are they?
15. Do you benchmark your client's progress towards self-sufficiency?
 - a. Do you follow-up with clients as part of your case management?
16. Do you use ANY self-sufficiency related benchmarking tools to expand, change or establish new programs aimed at clients' self-sufficiency?
 - a. If so, what are they?
17. How could the Self Sufficiency Standard direct or inform the work of your organization?
 - a. How could it be used to expand or establish new programs?
 - b. Retool existing programs?
18. How do you think your clients could benefit from the Self-Sufficiency Standard?
19. Besides, the Federal Poverty Line, what other eligibility criteria do other direct service providers use in their work?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Are they simpler or more applicable?

- c. How have they been used?

Implications of the Self-Sufficiency Standard

- 20. How do you think the Self-Sufficiency Standard could be used in your lobbying or advocacy efforts?
- 21. How could it impact your direct service work?
 - a. Would it change your target population?
- 22. How could it impact your fundraising, if at all?
- 23. How could it lead to new or innovative partnerships between your organization and others (other CBOs, employers, business sector, job trainers, policy makers), if at all?

Challenges of integrating the Self-Sufficiency Standard into the organization's work

- 24. What do you see as the potential challenges that could prevent advocacy organizations from utilizing the Self-Sufficiency Standard in their work?
 - a. How would you recommendation addressing them?
- 25. What do you see as the potential challenges that could prevent direct service providers from utilizing the Self-Sufficiency Standard in their work?
 - a. How would you recommendation addressing them?

Challenges to the Self-Sufficiency Standard at the policy level

- 26. What do you think are the challenges to having the Self-Sufficiency Standard adopted into state legislation and/or regulations?
 - a. How would you recommendations addressing them?

Recommended organizations, individuals we should talk with

- 27. Are there other organizations that you recommend we speak with?
- 28. (*Use if organization has more than one program*). Are there other programs within your organization that use eligibility criteria that we should speak too?

Appendix B: List of Interviewees

1. Roberta Avila, Executive Director, STEPS Coalition
2. Martha Bergmark, Executive Director, Mississippi Center for Justice
3. Carol Burnett, Executive Director, Low-Income Child Care Initiative, Mississippi
4. Jackie Lynn Coleman, Senior Director National Programs, Center for Economic Progress
5. Robert Gates, former Board Member, Delta Workforce Investment Board
6. Susan Glisson, Director, William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation
7. Cassandra Guess, Program Director, Mississippi Food Network
8. Sister Donna Gunn, Advocacy Director, Sacred Heart Family Center
9. Necole Irvin, Program Officer, Foundation of the Mid-South
10. Eva King, Family Services Coordinator, Friends of Children of Mississippi
11. Latisha Latiker, Regional Program Officer, Children Defense Fund's Southern Regional Office
12. Maria "Rabbit" Adel Lee, Program Manager, Gulf Coast Construction Career Center
13. Joann Mickens, Chapter Services Director, Parents for Public Schools
14. George Miles, Executive Director, Mid South Delta LISC, Local Initiatives Support Corporation
15. Dick Molpus, President, Molpus Woodlands Group (former Mississippi Secretary of State)
16. Leslie Newcomb, Executive Director, Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District
17. Domenico "Mimmo" Parisi, Director of National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center, Mississippi State University
18. Carol Penick, Executive Director, Women's Fund of Mississippi
19. Josephine Rhymes, Executive Director, Tri-Delta Workforce Alliance
20. Gloria Shields, Program Associate, Children's Defense Fund's Southern Regional Office
21. Ed Sivak, Director of Mississippi Economic Policy Center, Enterprise Corporation of the Delta
22. Cheryl Sparkman, Director, Division of Economic Assistance, Mississippi Department of Human Services
23. Dr. Debra West, Director of Career & Technical Education, Mississippi State Board for Community and Junior Colleges
24. Steve Williams, Executive Director, Mississippi Center for Education Innovation