

What We've Learned Opportunity Conferences

The Traverse Bay Poverty Reduction Initiative has hosted four Opportunity Conferences in May or June of each year from 2007 – 2010. At the Conference, Donna Beegle presents her life story, and her uplifting message of opportunity and potential for those in attendance. At the end of each Conference, attendees are asked to rate the event. The findings have been as follows:

Year	Attendance	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	A Little Helpful	Not at All Helpful
2007	210	90%	10%	0%	0%
2008	195	84%	16%	1%	0%
2009	325	79%	18%	3%	0%
2010**	185	67%	28%	2%	3%

**Results for 2010 are not directly comparable to prior years. In 2010, the evaluation did not ask the "overall, how helpful was this conference" question. Rather, participants were asked to rate the conference on four dimensions (useful, motivational, fun, educational, using an "agreement" scale). Data above aggregates 2010 responses on all four dimensions, and substitutes the "helpfulness" rating rather than the "level of agreement" rating.

During the spring of 2010, PRI undertook a survey based on a mailing list of people who had participated in PRI events within the last 18 months (including Opportunity Conferences, Saturday Specials, Neighborhood Meetings, and Navigators. This survey, potentially some years after having participated, asked respondents to evaluate how helpful each event had been when viewed in retrospect. Results are as follows:

- 43% rated Opportunity Conferences as being of great value
- 44% rated Opportunity Conferences as being very valuable
- 13% rated Opportunity Conferences as being of some value
- No one rated Opportunity Conferences as having no value

Participants report having taken many steps to move forward since their participation in Opportunity Conferences. 54% report having shared their own talents and skills with others; 51% report thinking about themselves in new and improved ways; 51% report having set some new goals for themselves; 39% have used their address books to contact other conference attendees; and 37% each report having attended a neighborhood meeting, and/or contacting a navigator (note that it may be the same respondent who reports having taken 3 or 4 steps).

Suggestions & Next Steps:

Participants have made many suggestions. Consistently mentioned are items such as the extent of time sitting, uncomfortable chairs, more time with navigators, and meal and prize suggestions. In addition, many feel that it becomes less helpful to hear the same presentation every year. While they would like an annual Opportunity Conference, participants suggest showcasing local success stories, and/or local resources.