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**Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc.**

**Community Action Plan 2023-2026**

*Addressing the Causes That Could Lead To Poverty*

**October 1, 2023-September 30, 2026**

**Approved by the Board of Directors September 28, 2023**



**The Promise of Community Action**

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

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**Community Action Plan Team Members:**

**Contracted Consultant:** Lori Teragawachi, Ed.D.

**MEO Staff:**

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| Debbie Cabebe, NCRT | Chief Executive Officer, (Team Leader) |
| Gay Sibonga, NCRI   | Chief Operating Officer                |
| Debbie Lorenzo      | Chief Fiscal Officer                   |
| Cliff Caesar        | Chief Human Resources Officer          |
| Lee Imada           | Executive Administrative Assistant     |
| David Daly          | Business Development Director          |
| Cassi Yamashita     | Community Services Director            |
| Debbi Amaral        | Early Childhood Services Director      |
| Mary Book           | Hana Branch Manager                    |
| Rose Ancheta        | Lanai Branch Manager                   |
| Mahie Mc Phearson   | Molokai Branch Director                |
| Patty Copperfield   | Transportation Director                |
| Dane Ka'ae          | Youth Services Director                |
| Guy Aquirre         | IT Manager                             |
| Mark Hammer         | Facilities Manager                     |

**MEO Board of Directors:**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
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| Gabe Johnson     | Lana'i Area Council                            |
| Reuben Ignaciao  | Hale Mahaolu                                   |
| Frank DeRego Jr. | Maui Native Hawaiian Chamber                   |
| Desiree Ting     | Central Pacific Bank                           |
| Sandy Ryan       | Maui Economic Development Board                |
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| Peter Horovitz   | Maui County Bar Association                    |
| Charles Andrion  | ILWU   |
| Ned Davis        | State Senator Roz Baker                        |
| Scott Okada      | State House Representative Angus Mc Kelvey     |
| Glenn Yamashita  | State House Representative Kyle Yamashita      |
| Traci Fujita     | Maui County Council                            |
| Cynthia Lallo    | Mayor Michael Victorino                        |

## Executive Summary

### Background

Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc. (MEO) chartered on March 22, 1965, is a private non-profit Community Action Agency. MEO provides outreach, resource information, and administers human service programs for low-income persons, the youth, elderly, immigrants, ex-offenders, persons with disabilities or medical needs, and other disadvantaged individuals and families. The agency was organized as a Community Action Agency under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to strengthen and coordinate efforts to eliminate poverty by providing opportunities in education, employment and training, transportation, and other areas to help people help themselves. MEO assists more than 19,000 individuals and families, touching the lives of 46,000 each year. There are five departments within MEO that help to strengthen the community:

1. MEO Community Services provides a range of assistance from employment and training programs, energy and rental assistance, reintegration, senior services, support for persons with disabilities, acculturation and translation services for the Hispanic/Latino community, legal services and more.
2. Early Childhood Services provides toddler care, and the Head Start Preschool program to promote school readiness, social/emotional development, and parent involvement.
3. Youth Services trains and mentor youth eleven to eighteen and facilitates prevention related programs and activities.
4. Transportation Services provides rides for low-income individuals, persons with disabilities, seniors, and youth allowing them to be independent and remove barriers to improve their quality of life.
5. MEO Business Development Center provides business classes, technical support and start up microloans to individuals with poor, little or no credit with a focus on women and minority owned businesses.

MEO is committed to fulfilling the Community Action Promise – *Community action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community and are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.*

MEO's vision is to improve the community by promoting economic independence and sustainability. Its mission is to strengthen the community while helping people in need, restore their hope, help them reach their potential, and enrich their lives.

MEO embraces the core values of Teamwork, Integrity, Personal Excellence, Empathy, Creativity, and Flexibility.

## **Purpose**

Federal organizational standards encourage agencies to conduct a Community Needs Assessment every three years. The needs assessment considers the perception of the causes of poverty and the breath of community needs addressing these causes, with the intention of sharing the assessment outcomes with MEO's community resource partners and developing a plan. A Community Needs Assessment was completed in August of 2022. The information gathered was reviewed and analyzed by staff and board members to develop a Community Action Plan to address gaps in services unmet needs that are alignment to MEO's mission.

## **Assumptions and Methodology**

Poverty is a complicated social issue and there are competing theories as to the cause of poverty in our community. MEO's services are diverse and numerous. Many of their services address and impact poverty within the community. Poverty is often defined in two ways: 1. Absolute Poverty where individuals do not have what they need for maintaining life. They are short of basic food, shelter, clothing, adequate health care, education, and even transportation. 2. Relative Poverty which is viewed as subjective. The poor are those who lack what is needed by most Americans to live decently because they earn less than half of the nation's median income. The Maui County Data Book 2020, in the section entitled Census Bureau Quick Facts, Maui County Persons in Poverty is 10.7%, with Maui's Median household income (in 2019 dollars) at \$80,948.

A Survey was developed addressing the various causes of poverty. Each item had two corresponding questions. The first question asks for the person's opinion on the importance of addressing the issue affecting poverty with a range from very important to completely unimportant with addressing the issue of poverty. The second question asks about the person's satisfaction regarding the community's current services that address the issue. The range utilized was very satisfied to completely unsatisfied.

Assumption 1: Respondents of the survey may not have the same definition of poverty or be knowledgeable of all the services MEO currently provides within the community that address poverty.

Assumption 2: The Survey provides an opportunity to obtain respondent's individual perceptions on the various causes of poverty and their satisfaction regarding the services that are provided.

Assumption 3: If respondents do not complete sections of the survey, it can be assumed that they were not knowledgeable of the services currently provided, and only the responses that were provided, will be utilized in the compilation.

Assumption 4: At times the respondent may not respond to the satisfaction of a service that addresses the issue because it does not apply to them personally. A selection of the choice of NA may mean the respondent would not utilize the service versus the service not being valuable.

## **Summary of Data**

More than 1,150 surveys were distributed. Of the 1,150 distributed surveys, 241 were returned which calculates to a 21% response rate. In addition to the survey, focus groups and key informant interviews

were conducted to acquire additional information and input. Also, specific feedback and suggestions was acquired for each of MEO's 5 departments. A total of 70 individuals participated in 4 focus groups, and key informants' interviews. The completed comprehensive Community Needs Assessment also includes data and information from the 2020 Maui County Data Book, 2021 Edition State of Hawaii Data Book, an MIT research paper on Living Wage, US Census Bureau, Maui Now Survey on Current Issues Affecting Maui County, and the Maui Economic Development Board Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Report.

### **Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc. - 2022 Community Needs Assessment Survey Results – A Survey on the Causes That Could Lead to Poverty**

Overview - A Survey was developed addressing the various causes of poverty. Each item had two corresponding questions. The first question asks for the person's opinion on the importance of addressing the issue pertaining to poverty with a range from very important to completely unimportant. The second question asks about the person's satisfaction regarding the community's current services that address the issue. The range was very satisfied to completely unsatisfied.

**While the survey, focus groups and key informant interviews identified multiple issues, the following is a list of identified top priorities:**

- Expand support services to Polynesian, Pacific Islanders, Tongan, Filipino, and Asian - language/cultural program/acclimation/translation services.
- Expand the BEST reentry Program to provide more services and reach more individuals.
- Expand energy and rental assistance programs for Kupuna.
- Boarder reach to the LBGTQ community.
- Attract and retain early learning professionals through stronger recruitment and retention strategies to include pay equity.
- Expand Kahi Kamalii services to other sites to care for newborns to 3 years of age.
- Expand facilities and staff to address the need for childcare.
- Expand youth prevention program to include domestic violence prevention in teen relationships.
- Expand youth financial literacy classes.
- Expand suicide prevention program.
- Develop employment/job training/mentorship programs for youth.
- Implement the use of digital apps to book and cancel reservations and check on rides.
- Expand transportation service areas and hours.
- Maximize capacity on buses, i.e.; more riders per bus.
- Collaborate with child welfare to provide rides for children in foster care.
- Provide emergency transport to emergency shelter such as Women Helping Women.
- Move fleet to fuel efficient vans and buses.
- Money management for youth and teens to include financial literacy, applying for financial aid and creating and maintaining a budget.
  - Develop a mentorship program that matches clients/new business/entrepreneurs with established business operators.

- Increase grant funding for startup or expansion businesses.

**Criteria Used to Determine How Initiatives and Services Addressing Needs Were Prioritized**

- Alignment with MEO’s mission
- Input and feedback received from the Community Needs Assessment
- The depth of the issue in the community
- The impact of the issue in the community
- Current resources already available outside of the agency to address the issue
- MEO’s current involvement in the issue
- MEO’s fiscal budget and operational capabilities
- MEO’s ability to impact the issue or the potential to impact the issue in the future

Initiatives meeting the criteria were identified as a priority, indicating that MEO resources (time, talent and treasure) could be allocated accordingly.

**Goals and Deliverables Addressing the Poverty Issue (ROMA Goals and Measurable Outcomes)  
October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2026**

**GOAL 1: INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WITH LOW-INCOMES ARE STABLE AND ACHIEVE ECONOMIC SECURITY.**

**Need statement:** Seniors (Kupuna) need a stable living environment.  
**Outcome:** Kupuna maintain a stable living environment.  
**Output:** Secure funding sources to assist Kupuna with paying rent or utility bills to offset a catastrophic event, i.e., unexpected major medical bill, loss of dependent support, etc.

**GOAL 2: COMMUNITIES WHERE PEOPLE WITH LOW-INCOMES LIVE ARE HEALTHY AND OFFER ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY.**

**Need statement:** There is a lack of qualified early learning educators.  
**Outcome:** An increased number qualified early learning educators.  
**Output:** A- Create a Child Development Associates apprentice program to expand the pool of qualified applicants by 25% annually.

**Need statement:** The inability to retain qualified early learning educators.  
**Outcome:** MEO is able to retain qualified early learning educators.  
**Output:** A- Develop and implement a retention strategy in year one  
 B- Increase the year one retention rate by 20% in year two and 30% in year three.

**GOAL 3: PEOPLE WITH LOW-INCOMES ARE ENGAGED AND ACTIVE IN BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN COMMUNITIES.**

- Need statement:** Prevention Program strategies are needed to improve the conditions of the Molokai community.
- Outcome:** Molokai Youth develop and implement prevention strategies that improve the conditions of the community.
- Output:** Molokai Youth create a prevention coalition and adopt strategies to address suicide, teen pregnancy, underage drinking, substance abuse and other risk taking behavior.

In closing, Agency Priorities are continually assessed throughout the year as community/resident trends and needs become evident. Program effectiveness continues to be addressed as lessons are learned and modifications are made for improvement.