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Poverty summit eyes job skills, more

By [Sherri Welch](#)

Forty local and national experts gathered in Detroit last week to present their ideas for reducing poverty in the country's largest metropolitan areas over the next two to four years.

The daylong series of presentations, hosted by **United Way for Southeastern Michigan**, was sparked by **CEOs for Cities** research that identifies \$13 billion in annual public benefit program savings from just a one percentage point drop in the poverty rate of the country's 51 largest metropolitan regions.

"Poverty very much can be a hidden problem in some areas," said Carol Coletta, CEO of Chicago-based CEOs for Cities.

While Detroit's poverty level is well-known, it's not as well-known that the levels in other large metropolitan areas, such as Austin, Houston, Nashville, Los Angeles and Columbus, Ohio, are higher than in metro Detroit, she said.

In metro Detroit, a one percentage point decrease in the poverty level could yield \$396 million annually in public benefit program savings, Coletta said.

CEOs for Cities plans to share recommendations from the poverty summit — available on its Web site at www.ceosforcities.org — with its national network of leaders during Strategy Session 2010, April 20-21 in New York. The top four recommendations by the poverty experts in Detroit last week were to:

- Reflect the purchasing power in poor neighborhoods and focus on accurate counts in the 2010 census to remove capital barriers to business investment in those areas.
- Invest in education and redesign the adult educational system to lower costs and serve adults better. Emphasize literacy gains for the lowest 20 percent income bracket.
- Provide training for middle-skill jobs to move people out of poverty and link job creation to an economic development strategy.
- Create choice and accountability in adult education and retraining, where the money follows participants and requires results from adult education and training programs.

United Way for Southeastern Michigan plans to use the group's recommendations to form its strategy for helping low-income families reach financial stability through efforts such as the Greater Detroit Center for Working Families.

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United Way and **Detroit Local Initiatives Support Corp** are working with **SER Metro-Detroit Jobs for Progress Inc.** to operate the center.

"We're creating incentives ... for actions individuals (can) take that will create the greatest impact on their financial position," United Way President and CEO Michael Brennan said.

Ultimately, a lot of what gets done in implementing the top recommendations for reducing poverty is going to depend on policymakers, said Lou Glazer, president of Ann Arbor-based **Michigan Future Inc.**

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