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OAP and Minnesota Budget Project propose unique tool for establishing equity in the state budget

“All communities in Minnesota could be helped by the “Kitchen Table Discussions” – shared principles that can inform the budgeting process for the Legislature”

say the two organizations

(January 26, 2009) ... Today, the Organizing Apprenticeship Project and the Minnesota Budget Project shared a new approach to resolving the state’s budget deficit. These “Kitchen Table Principles” came out of community discussions and can be used by legislators to inform state budgeting decisions this year.

Minnesota families, as well as the State of Minnesota, are struggling with what to do in this economic downturn. Late last fall, OAP, the Minnesota Budget Project, and partner organizations asked families around the state to reflect on the values and principles they used as families to manage tight budgets in hard times.

“When we asked ordinary people – people of color, low income people, people in cities, farmers — about their kitchen table discussions, what they told us, over and over again, was that in hard times families and communities stick together,” said Julia Freeman, Senior Organizer for Racial Justice at the Organizing Apprenticeship Project. “They make sure that what they do serves all of the family – particularly those who are struggling the most. And, even in hard times, they keep their eye on the future. This is what they are doing in their own families and they expect policymakers to do the same.”

The Kitchen Table Principles emphasize the importance of equity, of unity across communities, and of ensuring today’s decisions don’t undermine tomorrow’s prosperity. Based on the wisdom of Minnesotans, these principles advise lawmakers to:

- Solve the challenges for the whole community.
- Include Minnesotans in solving budget challenges.
- Invest for the long run.
- Look for additional resources.
- Invest wisely in priorities that create future success.

Minnesotans also want the state to keep the long term in mind, and make decisions that build prosperity for the long run. According to OAP and the Minnesota Budget Project, the state's long-term prosperity depends on decisions that build equity. Budget decisions, including spending cuts or reforms, must be anchored in a continued commitment to, and accountability for, racial and economic equity in Minnesota. It is essential for the economic future of our state.

"In response to past budget deficits, policymakers have seriously cut Minnesota's investments in ways that have had a disproportionate impact on low income families and families of color. Those decisions have contributed to real disparities that undermine Minnesota's future and our economic prosperity. Our analysis finds that those past budget decisions have contributed to the economic challenges that Minnesota families face today. We don't want make the same mistakes again. We can do better," said Nan Madden, Minnesota Budget Project director at the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits.

The Kitchen Table Principles are available online at www.oaproject.org.

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The Organizing Apprenticeship Project works to advance racial, cultural, social and economic justice in Minnesota through organizer and leadership training, policy research and strategic convening work. OAP's Annual Legislative Report Card is released during the legislative session.

The Minnesota Budget Project, an initiative of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, provides independent research, analysis and advocacy on budget and tax issues, emphasizing their impact on low- and moderate-income Minnesotans and the organizations that serve them. www.mncn.org/bp