12-2018

Full Issue

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Editorial

Dear readers,

After falling somewhat into disfavor based on a lack of demonstrable, community-wide progress (Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, and Dewar, 2010), the last decade has witnessed a rebirth of attention to place-based strategies for change (Brown, 2017; Behrens, 2018). Kania and Kramer (2011) provided added impetus to this refocus on communities by providing a simple framework — collective impact — for organizing community stakeholders to work together on targeted outcomes.

This model came under criticism as too top-down, failing to engage community members and grassroots organizations in identifying desired changes and collaboration to craft solutions (e.g., Wolf, 2016). Those committed to the basic collective impact model have modified their approach to be more inclusive,[1] others committed to community change have adopted different approaches and tools that build community participation in from the beginning. This issue on *Inclusive Community Change* highlights some of these alternative approaches and tools.

Teri Behrens, Ph.D.

The Denver Foundation used a community navigator approach, creating a peer-learning network among those whose job it is to help close service gaps and engage marginalized communities in the process. **Schaffer, Patiño, Jones, and Sullivan** share what they learned from this field-building approach to community change.

Simon, Nolan, Scobie, Backler, McDowell, Cotton, and Cloutier report on the work of the Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund (a donor-advised fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation) to create an integrated early childhood services delivery system in a rural area. Local community members joined forces with the fund to build capacity and quality in the system.

Brudney and Prentice examine how a tool relatively new to nonprofits — geographic information systems — can support community building. They argue that nonprofits, and particularly foundations, can use this technology to increase public participation, incorporate diverse stakeholders, improve organizational operations, increase market efficiencies, and build stronger communities.

The ABLe change framework (**Foster-Fishman and Watson**) includes a set of tools for engaging diverse stakeholders across an array of settings to become actors of change. The authors argue that these tools, which they have used in communities across the country, can be used by foundations to create the conditions that promote inclusive community change.

Francis, Desmond, Williams, Chubinski, Zimmerman, and Young describe the tools created for the Thriving Communities model, supported by Interact for Health, a health conversion foundation

[1] See http://collectiveimpactforum.org.

serving the three-state region of Greater Cincinnati, Ohio. The goal of this community-learning model is to embed health promotion and advocacy work in communities while building an equitable infrastructure to spread evidence-based practices.

Reflective Practice

Braff-Guajardo, Hang, Cooksy, Braughton, and Lo reflect on how a funder collaborative can increase and coordinate philanthropic investments to address the root causes of inequity. They describe a "community first" model, which emerged from the experience of a funders collaborative created to advance equity through policy and systems change in California's San Joaquin Valley. A model that seeks to create a partnership between funders and community and act equitably is key to "walking the talk" of inclusion.

A partnership among the Alleghany Foundation, two school districts, and the University of Virginia, explored by **Rimm-Kaufman, Donnan, Garcia, Snead-Johnson, Kotulka, and Sandilos,** provided evidence that school leaders and community members must be aligned in order for sustained school improvements to be achieved. With so many education policies and practices made at the local level, community-based foundations are in a unique position to support their local school districts in taking a comprehensive, systematic approach to improving the lives of young people.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation created Starting Smart and Strong, a 10-year place-based commitment to early learning in three California communities. **Sunshine and Sangalang** reflect on the foundation's experience, three years into implementation, with managing this complex initiative. Foundation staff, especially program officers, were compelled to think differently about how to engage with the community.

Beginning in 2011, Vancouver Foundation invested significant time, energy, ideas, and money in bringing together immigrant and refugee youth and young people with lived experience of the foster care system in British Columbia. **Smith** describes the Fostering Change and Fresh Voices initiatives, in which the foundation worked in partnership with these young people to address the issues that affect their lives. This article describes the roles the foundation played in these inclusive community change efforts, and reflects on the commitments, mindsets, and capacities necessary to effectively perform each of those roles.

Some observations across these articles are:

1. *Mindset matters.* Approaching the work of community change with a mindset of genuine partnership is a basic requirement for inclusive change. While this may be obvious, "tools" or "models" for change are needed but they can't mask a less-than-genuine commitment to partnership.

2. *Community change is almost always system-building work.* While the terminology may differ (aligning, networking, field-building, etc.), the core work described in these articles is working with communities to connect parts to create higher functioning systems.

3. *Foundations are part of the systems they seek to change.* How foundations interact with each other and other community institutions, how they conceptualize their role in the community and how these in turn play out in the daily work of program staff — these all are part of the community system and need to part of the change efforts.

4. *There is no one "right" model.* Having a model to work from may be helpful, especially one that has inclusive partnerships built in, but there's no evidence to date that any one model is superior in fostering inclusive change.
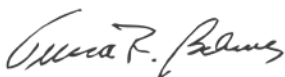
One of the tenets of adaptive systems is that systems self-organize around simple rules. As I've noted elsewhere (Behrens and Foster-Fishman, 2007), focusing on system players following a set of simple rules, perhaps variations on the observations above, might make the biggest difference in communities.

This issue also includes reviews of two recent books that are relevant for the theme of this issue. **Pankaj** reviews *The Goldilocks Challenge: Right-fit Evidence for the Social Sector.* Finding the right approach to evidence is a key challenge to change efforts and this book offers some useful suggestions. **Olivarez** reviews *Decolonizing Wealth,* which calls for radical change in the mindset we bring to philanthropic dollars.

Thank you to the **Colorado Health Foundation** and the **California Endowment** for their sponsorship of this issue, which allows us to make the entire issue open access.

As we close out Volume 10, I want to thank the many field experts who have contributed their time to providing thoughtful peer reviews of submitted articles. Our authors often express their gratitude for the feedback they get to improve their work. A list of reviewers for Volume 10 is included in the back of the issue.

Finally, as we complete our tenth year of publication, I want to thank all of you who support the journal by submitting articles, sponsoring articles or whole issues, and sharing the journal with your peers. We're proud to play some small role in helping to advance the field and your contributions of time, talent, treasure and ties make it possible.

Teresa R. Behrens, Ph.D.
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Community Navigation as a Field of Practice: Reframing Service Delivery to Meet the Needs of Communities' Marginalized Populations

Joby Schaffer, M.A., Spark Policy Institute; M. Julie Patiño, J.D., P. Barclay Jones, B.S., and LaDawn Sullivan, B.S., The Denver Foundation

Introduction

Service providers increasingly recognize the complex and intertwined issues facing marginalized communities, including immigrant and refugee communities and communities of color. Often, the supports needed by these individuals and families do not fit neatly into the spectrum of services provided by any one agency. This challenge has dynamically changed how agencies are helping people find and maintain stable housing, maintain safety, and alleviate hunger. Over the past 10 years in the Denver metro area, the Denver Foundation observed that innovative social service providers in both the nonprofit and government sectors were embracing the idea of working with locally connected individuals and organizations to coordinate access to multiple types of services to improve outcomes and enhance the well-being of their clients, recognizing that these community navigators are often already living and working in our communities.

Building on its experience using an asset-based community development approach (Green, Moore, & O'Brien, 2006; McKnight & Kretzmann, 1993), the foundation began exploring what navigation could look like in the areas of access to nutritious food, the prevention and ending of homelessness, and support for those impacted by violence, abuse, and neglect.

Navigation has a long history in health care, where the complexity of health systems often necessitates a well-informed guide to help

> ### Key Points
>
> - Community navigators help individuals and families access local services and assistance through a combination of referrals and interpersonal support. The Denver Foundation launched the Basic Human Needs Navigator Learning Community in February 2014 to help navigators working with local organizations and community members practicing navigation independently improve their practice and identify similarities and differences in their approaches.
>
> - This article discusses the multiyear, peer-learning project, including the general lessons the foundation learned about both navigation and the use of a learning-community approach to reach its field-building goals.
>
> - Reports from participating organizations and community members over four years suggest the efficacy of both navigation as a model for addressing gaps in service provision and of the learning-community approach in driving early-stage field-building outcomes.

patients overcome systems- and individual-level barriers (Gilson et al., 1989; Swider, 2002; Andrews, Felton, Wewers, & Heath, 2004; Kim, Koniak-Griffin, Flaskerud, & Guarnero, 2004; Ingram, Sabo, Rothers, Wennerstrom, & De Zapien, 2008; Baquero et al., 2009; Freeman & Rodriguez, 2011). Similarly, the *promotora* — or

The combination of a clear community need identified by The Denver Foundation's Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative and the lack of a shared identity, robust research base, and infrastructure to support practicing community navigators led the foundation to set its objectives based on a field-building perspective and to develop an approach in line with field-building strategy

lay health worker — model's capacity to improve health outcomes, specifically in Latino populations, is supported by multiple studies (Balcazar et al., 2006; Lujan, Ostwald, & Ortiz, 2007; Keller & Cantue, 2008; Koskan, Hilfinger Messias, Friedman, Brandt, & Walsemann, 2013). While the evidence base for the models helped the foundation justify its decision to support and set its expectations for navigation in basic human needs (BHN),[1] the dearth of research[2] into the model's application to BHN made the foundation cautious about wholesale adoption of these evidence-based practices. More importantly, the foundation was cautious about making recommendations to navigators who might be practicing in more effective ways than suggested by the current literature.

Perhaps more importantly, the identity of community navigation is not well established. Whereas the field of health navigation is

established in practice — many hospitals and clinics hire health navigators, for example — community navigation is generally treated as a function of other roles, such as community organizer or case manager. And in the case of community members not affiliated with a provider or other grassroots organization, those practicing community navigation largely do not identify as navigators.

The combination of a clear community need identified by The Denver Foundation's Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI) and the lack of a shared identity, robust research base, and infrastructure to support practicing community navigators led the foundation to set its objectives based on a field-building perspective and to develop an approach in line with field-building strategy. Field-building aims at building infrastructure through some combination of focus on five components: "shared identity, standards of practice, knowledge base, leadership and grassroots support, and funding and supporting policy" (James Irvine Foundation, 2009, p. 4). A funder's focus and tactics will depend on the details of a specific field. Given the early development of navigation as a field and the foundation's aim to improve the capacity of local navigators to address the barriers to access faced by members of their communities, its initial field-building aims were:

- Uncover the "identity" of community navigation — specify what constitutes community navigation and how it differs from similar models.

- Start building a research base on the "impact" of community navigation — characterize the major client and community outcomes of navigation and specify tentative principles of effective navigation.

In its last year of foundation funding, the need to support navigators in sustaining their practice

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[1] This literature points to important mechanisms through which navigation leads to such outcomes as building community capacity to access and deliver health care (Zimmerman, 2000). This literature also highlights challenges faced by navigators, including that a lack of recognition for these positions by various funding channels compromises their sustainability (Koskan et al., 2013).

[2] Important exceptions include Serrata, Hernandez-Martinez, & Macias (2016).

highlighted the importance of allies to support community navigators in building the field, leading the foundation to add a third field-building goal in the past year:

- Build knowledge of community navigation among service providers (nonprofit and government agencies) — starting in the Denver metro area, explore the appeal of community navigation among those in the wider service sector.

This article describes what the foundation has learned in pursuing these goals. The first section examines the details and genesis of its learning-community approach. The second section describes how it evaluated the Basic Human Needs Navigator Learning Community and details what the foundation has learned about the identity and impact of navigation. Building on these insights, the third section summarizes the foundation's major insights about community navigation and using the learning-community approach to reach its field-building goals.

A Learning-Community Approach to Elevate Undersupported Navigation Efforts

The Denver Foundation, which serves the seven-county metro Denver area, is the oldest and largest community foundation in Colorado; its mission is to inspire people and mobilize resources to strengthen the community. In its BHN objective area, the charge is to work at both systemic and frontline levels to address the basic human needs of the marginalized in metro Denver, with a primary focus on improving the lives of those experiencing hunger (food access, security, and justice), homelessness, and domestic violence. To achieve this goal, the foundation drew on its experience in its Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative, the foundation's stand-alone, 20-plus-year-old grassroots grantmaking program. Built on an asset-based community development approach (Green et al., 2006; McKnight & Kretzmann, 1993), the SNI fosters relationships with community members and groups and supports community-led use of existing assets (e.g., schools, people, talents, positive

efforts, community will) to address neighborhood issues.

The foundation's work through the SNI provided numerous examples of the impediments faced by marginalized individuals, families, and communities in accessing support for basic human needs. Many of these gaps related to services that were not designed to meet the needs of marginalized populations, not accessible because of linguistic or cultural barriers, or constantly changing as service providers moved or otherwise ceased to operate. This observation was echoed during a 2011–2012 listening tour involving over 150 interviews with a diverse range of groups and individuals, including leaders from the metro Denver nonprofit sector and members of resident-led community groups. These informants noted that many services are underutilized because clients do not know about them or do not have the skills to navigate the systems, and these challenges were amplified in immigrant and refugee communities.

The foundation's work through the SNI also made it aware of various grassroots efforts that operated, albeit often inefficiently and at a smaller scale than necessary to generate large-scale impact, to address these service gaps. First, individual community navigators — locally recognized community members who in many cases had extensive experience working in communities to help their neighbors access services and resources — were a common feature of both the immigrant Latino and the refugee communities. Many people in these communities relied on these individuals to make them aware of existing services and to help them overcome language and cultural barriers and manage the complex processes of many service providers. Second, various large and small grassroots organizations were addressing gaps in service delivery by referring individuals to other providers when the organizations could not meet their clients' needs. This included developing extensive personal relationships with other providers to understand the quality of services offered by their referral partners. However, while it was clear that the practice of navigation had long existed in these communities, it was also clear that there was no

[W]hile it was clear that the practice of navigation had long existed in these communities, it was also clear that there was no shared identity around community navigation: those who practiced navigation did not think of themselves as doing so. To understand the identity and impact of navigation while simultaneously building a network of navigators able to more effectively respond to the challenges of their communities, the foundation funded a group of individual and organization-based community navigators to meet regularly through a learning-community approach[.]

- *Peer learning and support.* Participants would participate in learning circles (Collay, Dunlap, Enloe, & Gagnon, 1998; Lovett, 1999) to share insights and provide mutual support.

- *Topical training.* Relevant training topics were identified with the participants and consultants were hired to facilitate trainings on these topics.

- *Experimentation and adaptation.* Participants were encouraged to adapt their activities based on their learning.

The initial cohort of participants was rigorously vetted, a process again made possible by the foundation's work through the SNI and through the foundation's community grants program. Through these initiatives, the foundation built strong relationships in the three communities from which the 20 initial members of the BHN Navigator Learning Community cohort were drawn. Specifically, those selected had demonstrated experience in one of the three BHN issues, community support for their work, a viable pilot proposal with respect to navigation practices, and a commitment to sharing information and working with others to improve navigation strategies in their communities.

From the start of the cohort in 2014, small shifts in the membership led to the departure of roughly half of the original members and the addition of new members. Over the course of the project the calendar of work stayed roughly the same, including a two-day kickoff to revisit prior learnings and update learning-community and coaching plans; seven to nine peer-to-peer trainings facilitated by a group of project consultants with extensive experience in service delivery; one-on-one coaching from the project consultants; and an end-of-year celebration session that included a review of the evaluation findings.

Navigation's Identity and Impact: Evaluation and Findings

In line with its focus on encouraging experimentation and adaptation, the Denver Foundation's

shared identity around community navigation: those who practiced navigation did not think of themselves as doing so.

To understand the identity and impact of navigation while simultaneously building a network of navigators able to more effectively respond to the challenges of their communities, the foundation funded a group of individual and organization-based community navigators to meet regularly through a learning-community approach premised on:

approach to evaluation was learning-based and focused on utilization. It aimed to capture learning, articulate the emerging identity of navigation, support decision making in real time, and describe the outcomes of navigation work. The foundation recognized that this approach would prevent it from rigorously evaluating the impact of navigation, but it would enable it to develop a preliminary set of findings for further examination as the field took root and additional cases became available for study. The third-party firm providing evaluation support took a threefold approach:

1. *Learning from experimentation.* The evaluation encouraged the navigators to experiment with different approaches while reporting monthly and biannually on what they are learning about what is effective.

2. *Describing impact.* The evaluation team stressed the need for detailed accounts of their successes and failures to identify how navigation complements other practices and its unique value-add.

3. *Testing principles of effective navigation.* The evaluation developed tentative statements on what constitutes navigation and what constitutes principles of effective navigation. Each year, these documents were revised based on new learning.

Using this approach, the evaluation has so far supported the following general insights about the identity and impact of navigation.

The Identity of Community Navigation

Navigation is practiced by many agencies and nonprofits, but a shared identity around navigation is still in its infancy. At a minimum, community navigation is the combination of personal needs assessment and information provision: the effort to uncover and meet the basic human needs of people through building trusting relationships and then connecting people to appropriate services and supports. In all cases, navigation involves engagement on both ends, from the client and from service providers.

> *At a minimum, community navigation is the combination of personal needs assessment and information provision: the effort to uncover and meet the basic human needs of people through building trusting relationships and then connecting people to appropriate services and supports.*

An Interpersonal Activity

Navigation is a profoundly interpersonal activity that, to be successful, requires high levels of interpersonal experience and skills. Many of these derive from lived experience, but they also include interpersonal skills common to similar models found in social work.

On engagement with clients, navigators pointed to an important difference between what they call their "whole person" approach and what is generally thought of as case management. Noting that many of their clients dealt with case managers who did not take time to understand their unique circumstances, members of the Navigator Learning Community said their work requires an effort to recognize the full range of a person's basic human needs and then to develop a tailored plan of action that goes beyond simply providing information or referrals.

Shared lived experience is a factor the navigators stressed as essential to achieving this type of understanding. The foundation's cohort includes former refugees who work with the large refugee population in East Denver, and immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries who work with the immigrant population in Denver's Westwood and Commerce City neighborhoods.

Navigation is a profoundly networked activity that demands high levels of engagement among navigators as well as support from providers, including allies among foundations, government agencies, and others willing to play a role in supporting navigation as an occupational field.

The evaluation highlighted three core activities of navigation that are informed by lived experience:

1. *Bridging.* Navigators in the foundation's cohort talk about the act of "bridging" with clients, which involves establishing the trust necessary for clients to share their needs and welcome questions and suggestions from the navigator. Sharing their lived experience, navigators are able to establish that initial bond.

2. *Offering credible systems knowledge.* Navigators' lived experience helps to validate the advice they give to clients. A navigator who has had experience with a service provider can share the client's perspective, which enables meaningful communication not only about what kind of assistance a client will receive, but how the client will be treated. Moreover, when the navigator has personally experienced working through a particular system, such as Medicaid, clients will gain invaluable benefits from that specific knowledge. Navigators report that, as a result, many of their clients tell them they trust their suggestions.

3. *Setting boundaries.* The deep level of cultural competence that can come from lived experience helped many navigators better understand how to set boundaries with clients in a culturally relevant way. As many navigators initially experienced, helping a client facing BHN challenges runs the risk of creating a dependent relationship between that person. Interpreting signs of growing dependency and choosing a course of action will not diminish the relationship requires a strong understanding of cultural norms and beliefs.

Centering lived experience further differentiates community navigation from similar models, like case management, which tend to devalue lived experience in favor of formal certification. This is not to suggest, however, that trainings and certifications are not important to navigation. Indeed, members of the Navigator Learning Community stressed the value to their work of trainings in topics common to case management, specifically trauma-informed care, cultural awareness, and professionalism.

Relationships With Providers

Navigation is a profoundly networked activity that demands high levels of engagement among navigators as well as support from providers, including allies among foundations, government agencies, and others willing to play a role in supporting navigation as an occupational field.

Effective navigators are not only "bridgers" with clients, but are also skilled at establishing and maintaining knowledge of and relationships with service providers and other navigators. Because a key function is to connect people to services and resources, an effective navigator is not simply aware of these existing resources, but also familiar with their quality and how to access them. This distinguishes navigation from a platform model such as 2-1-1 or AuntBertha.com, which many navigators say they rarely use because of experiences with unreliable information that damaged their credibility with clients. Instead, the navigators in this cohort have tried to guarantee quality information about providers

through a combination of approaches, although it remains a persistent challenge.

Many community navigators focus on building relationships with providers, and those who specialize in helping people with specific challenges are aware of the main providers of services for those challenges. Moreover, a key function of community navigators, as with similar actors such as community health workers (Lehmann & Sanders, 2007), is to advocate on behalf of their clients. While a robust understanding of a system's processes is important, it is also essential to understand how best to engage providers at those times when it is necessary to persuade them to change their practices. The challenge, however, is the time commitment required to cultivate relationships with providers, many of whom are small enough to avoid listing (e.g., a group that sets up an informal food bank) or that may cease operations.

Most navigators rely on a mix of personal relationships and other approaches to learning about community resources, including cohort-informed information platforms (which may initially be handwritten lists that are later transferred to an Excel document, and, later, to the Internet). One promising approach is the use of resource-sharing sessions. The foundation funded one navigator to develop a monthly session where navigators and service providers discuss available resources. Assessed through reports of participating members, this approach has been effective at networking navigators with providers, building the knowledge of navigators about existing services and points of contact, and expanding awareness of navigation as a field.

The Impact of Navigation

The Denver Foundation's approach of detailed storytelling and occasional engagement with clients and partners surfaced a set of important preliminary insights about the impact of navigators. Based on those insights, the BHN Navigator Learning Community developed and periodically updates a set of principles of effective navigation. (See Appendix.)

Client-Level Outcomes

Given the differences in navigation approaches, resources and organizational support, and the served communities themselves, output measures of navigator activity (e.g., the number of people helped each month and the percentage of those people who were repeat clients) are helpful in providing a basic understanding of a navigator's work. These outputs varied considerably among the members of the Navigator Learning Community. In 2018, for example, the number of people engaged ranged from 30, with a part-time, individual navigator, to 2,000, with a well-staffed organization. The percentage of repeat clients ranged from 5 percent at an organization helping a highly transient population to 100 percent with an individual navigator with deep relationships in a highly connected neighborhood. Unfortunately, none of the members of the Navigator Learning Community had the resources to adequately track the percentage of clients served that exhibited a set of key identified outcomes. As a result, these initial efforts to better understand the impact of navigation were shifted from measuring the scale of impact to describing types of impact, leading to three primary client-level outcomes:

1. accessing services and supports,

2. a sense of empowerment and social support, and

3. demonstration of skills, knowledge, and experience to navigate themselves.

First, the primary aim of navigation is to connect clients to appropriate services and support. What constitutes "appropriate" depends on the findings of the needs assessment conducted by the navigator, which leads to an action plan that ideally prioritizes root challenges, like unemployment or lack of housing, while addressing symptomatic challenges, like a lack of food. In addition to the range of resources available, the success of the members of the Navigator Learning Community in helping clients access appropriate services and supports varied with the navigator's knowledge and relationships with providers. Navigators with extensive experience in their communities

Navigators with extensive experience in their communities were more successful. Organizational navigators also tended to face fewer barriers than individual navigators. Most notably, the available evidence suggests that providers tend to place greater trust in navigators with organizational backing than they did in unaffiliated community members.

were more successful. Organizational navigators also tended to face fewer barriers than individual navigators. Most notably, the available evidence suggests that providers tend to place greater trust in navigators with organizational backing than they did in unaffiliated community members.

Second, clients often develop a sense of empowerment and increased sense of social support. Many of the clients served by navigators are beset by multiple challenges. For example, it is common for a client to approach a navigator for an issue like a lack of food. But in the bridging process, the navigator will uncover that the food insecurity is linked to unemployment or a hostile marital situation. The navigator is also often able to draw out that clients enter the relationship with the navigator with little hope. Many clients who, through the navigator's knowledge of providers that can meet these various needs, then begin to resolve both immediate and deeper needs report a feeling of self-sufficiency and hope. Even when clients are not able to address everything, they often report the benefit of simply "feeling heard": they experience a

sense a connection and support that is otherwise often lacking.

Finally, navigators do not simply provide information about resources, but instead co-create with their clients an "action plan" that aims to help clients develop the skills and knowledge they need to navigate on their own. However, the clients of navigators often require help when they first engage with providers. Navigators who practice boundaries and operate from a principle of enabling clients were better able to build a client's capacity to engage independently. When navigators do not observe this principle or set boundaries, dependence was an occasional issue, especially for high-need clients.

Community Level
While navigators in this cohort primarily focused on client-level outcomes, some of the more established navigators also engaged in advocacy and training, which led to two community-level outcomes: shifts in organizational practices and expanded informal community navigation.

First, veteran navigators are experts in local systems of service provision, enabling them to help increase the efficiency of services. Over the past four years, there were various examples of navigators helping service providers adjust their practices. For example, one organization focused on serving Denver's refugee population connected its navigators with local resettlement agencies to help those agencies better understand the needs and challenges faced by refugees, to understand how their processes hinder access, and to establish relationships with navigators to better connect refugees to the services they offer.

A related finding of this learning community is that navigators are well placed to serve as advocates for systems change outside the immediate service sector. Indeed, the lessons learned from the Navigator Learning Community helped the foundation confront its own work as a community actor and influencer. For instance, navigators reported high incidences of racial discrimination faced by the community members they sought to help, along with an amalgam of

larger institutional barriers that included a lack of legal immigration status and the paucity of affordable housing.

Second, some navigators aimed to amplify their impact by training clients to become informal navigators themselves. Preliminary evidence suggests the potential for informal navigation to spread — the members of the Navigator Learning Community often report that former clients share information and take the initiative to help their neighbors as a result of their experience with a navigator. These stories suggest that this is more common in highly connected neighborhoods with a less-transient client population, presumably due to the higher exposure to navigation among these clients.

Overarching Lessons

Combining these insights about the identity and impact of community navigation with reflections on the work of the past few years, the Denver Foundation surfaced lessons about community navigation as a model for supporting marginalized populations and about using the learning-community approach to achieve its field building goals.

First, community navigation embodies the asset-based community development model applied to marginalized populations. The model is premised on the idea that it is important to make use of a community's existing assets before introducing new supports. Community navigation embodies this model in that it ensures that existing providers are accessed by marginalized populations and, as seen in the case of Denver's immigrant and refugee communities, that community members often informally take on navigation duties. Using and improving existing assets has been particularly critical to the marginalized populations in the Denver metro area, many of whom are only able to access services through a navigator. While the learning community was necessarily a small group of navigators, the demonstrated ability of these navigators to address even the most challenging cases suggests that community navigation is an effective way to address gaps in traditional systems not generally designed to support marginalized communities.

While navigators in this cohort primarily focused on client-level outcomes, some of the more established navigators also engaged in advocacy and training, which led to two community-level outcomes: shifts in organizational practices and expanded informal community navigation.

However, the "whole person" approach aimed for by community navigators tends to be time consuming. The navigators in the learning community recognized this challenge, but most argued that quality care outweighed the need to see additional people.

Second, the learning-community approach was an effective but limited tool in meeting field-building goals. Various elements of the approach did prove important to helping the foundation meet those goals. Through ongoing dialogue and discussion of what had been learned, the learning community and its evaluation generated documents detailing the shared "identity" of community navigators (skills, values, and knowledge), the principles of effective navigation, and the various ways navigation is practiced.

Various challenges facing navigators were also uncovered. These challenges were the impetus for trainings that now serve as key components of a navigator curriculum, including trainings on trauma-informed care, cultural awareness, setting boundaries, and planning for sustainability. Similarly, the learning community discovered the importance of linking to other venues and organizations to provide additional trainings for

The learning community struggled to develop innovative ways for organizations to partner with individual navigators to provide flexibility and accountability. Future funders could support this field by helping surface approaches to monetization and sustainability, whether by experimenting with new approaches or importing principles from other fields.

navigators, including training to receive certification on key BHN areas like domestic violence.

The learning-community approach also created a strong sense of shared identity among the navigators, and it spawned important new venues for navigators to meet, like the resource-sharing meetings funded by the foundation after the navigators called for this opportunity. The navigators in the cohort consistently stressed that the most valuable part of the learning community was its role as a venue for ongoing peer learning and support, and they praised the foundation's provision of information, staff, language translation, and cultural competence on the part of facilitators as essential to building camaraderie. In addition to providing trade knowledge and skills, relationships among navigators also helped to ensure they received much needed emotional support. Navigation, as one navigator noted, can often be a "lonely endeavor." The regular meetings of the learning community were critical in helping create a true community of navigators willing to support each other.

These contributions notwithstanding, it is clear that a learning community needs complementary efforts to help a field of practice like community navigation emerge and sustain. First, as the learning community entered its last two years of foundation grant support, a key challenge was developing structures to sustainably fund individual navigation and incentivize organizations to hire navigators. The difficulty in devising effective monetization approaches is particularly clear in the case of navigators who are not affiliated with organizations. Working with individual navigators, as with all employees, includes making room for everything they bring to the work — family, economic stressors, and community dynamics. The learning community struggled to develop innovative ways for organizations to partner with individual navigators to provide flexibility and accountability. Future funders could support this field by helping surface approaches to monetization and sustainability, whether by experimenting with new approaches or importing principles from other fields.

While the Navigator Learning Community likely could have done more to advance its thinking about sustainable models, in Denver, navigation is still underrated as a "paid" (that is, professional) role in an organization or community. For navigation to take root, allies of navigators, including foundations and other funders, have key roles to play in exploring and creating incentives for other organizations to value the skills and experience navigators possess. In retrospect, the foundation could have designed the learning community to include more regular engagement of its member navigators with organizations in the community. Recognizing this, the foundation in the past year has engaged with local organizations in the three BHN areas — housing, domestic violence, and food — that may be interested in navigation to discuss what the foundation has learned, assess whether they are interested in working with navigators, and, if so, describe ways they can do so.

Related to this, the foundation's approach to the Navigator Learning Community and evaluation are only the beginning of the research base and

associated principles of effective navigation that are needed to advance the field. While evaluation focused on learning and utilization advanced an initial description of identity and impact, these descriptions are not well-established and merit refinement and further testing by funders and their evaluators.[3]

Third, funders could support navigation as a field with efforts to elevate a navigator's role as a natural advocate. While one of the initial goals of the Learning Community project staff was to help navigators to engage policymakers about the systemic impediments faced by marginalized community members in their quest to access basic human needs based-services and supports, this objective largely fell by the wayside as the initiative instead focused on the pragmatism of identifying key attributes, supporting experimentation, and further building capacity of the community navigators involved in the learning community. This issue is nevertheless one worthy of attention and support going forward, as it provides an opportunity for policymakers, service providers, and other interested parties to gain additional value from navigators who can help them better understand the challenges relative to access, quality, and appropriateness of services.

Finally, funders of navigation should seek to avoid siloing navigation into one program or objective area. The Denver Foundation's Navigators Learning Community started in the foundation's BHN objective area. While there was some connection and partnership with the Leadership & Equity objective area and it brought the benefit of shared learning and evaluation practices, it came too late. The richness of the navigator network and the navigator practice now spilling over into the foundation's two other objective areas, Economic Opportunity and Education, should have been built into the design sooner, which through access to the networks surrounding these objective areas would also likely enable the foundation to reach its third field-building goal of raising the profile of navigation in the area.

Today, the term "navigation" is still not widely used by foundations, the service sector, or communities, and it is often difficult for providers to depart from seeing it as the province of academically credentialed staff who engage in traditional forms of case management.

Conclusion

The Denver Foundation's Navigator Learning Community approach to support a community navigation field of practice was largely successful in building a shared identity among the cohort of navigators and surfacing insights to form a preliminary base of research. The foundation also learned that the learning-community approach was limited in achieving the external-facing goals essential to sustaining an emergent field. Today, the term "navigation" is still not widely used by foundations, the service sector, or communities, and it is often difficult for providers to depart from seeing it as the province of academically credentialed staff who engage in traditional forms of case management.

Future efforts, and early-stage field-building efforts in general, should consider how to take advantage of the peer-learning elements of learning communities while promoting navigation as an approach to agencies and institutions in the local system of service provision. While more work is needed, based on the evidence to date the Denver Foundation is confident that community navigation as revealed through this initiative can truly embody the essence of community-centered work that starts with the experience of impacted persons' situational needs and concerns, and moves outward to sources of assistance and support.

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[3] For now, funders interested in advancing navigation might consider adopting the described outcomes in their evaluation plans and testing the principles described in the Appendix.

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APPENDIX The Principles of Effective Navigation

Skills and Attitudes	**Empowering, not Fixing**	Aim to empower clients to navigate for themselves rather than focusing on quick fixes that may lead to dependence on the navigator.
	Patience, Compassion, and Empathy	Practice a "whole person" approach, which requires patience to uncover a client's full set of challenges and compassion and empathy to build the trust necessary to work together.
	Systems Knowledge and Experience	Be aware of how local systems of service provision operate, including drawing on personal experience working through those systems.
	Cultural and Linguistic Fluency	Be able to communicate with clients in their preferred language and understand how cultural norms and nuances affect how clients approach navigation and engage systems.
	Coaching Skills and Trauma-Informed Awareness	Be well-versed in coaching clients to access supports and lend advice rooted in awareness of how trauma affects the capacity of clients to engage with systems and develop self-sufficiency.
Processes	**Create a Safe Space**	Always create a safe space for clients to communicate their needs and practice access supports.
	Assess Needs	Practice a "whole person" approach, which requires assessing the full range of a person's needs.
	Develop Action Plans and Follow-Up	Develop action plans with clients that involve opportunities to follow up with those clients.
	Set Boundaries	Establish boundaries with clients to avoid creating dependency in the navigator-client relationship.
Supports	**Support Circles**	Connect with other navigators to receive social and emotional support.
	Provider Buy-In	Seek to develop provider buy-in for navigation.
	Feedback, Training, and Standards	Aim to solicit feedback from trusted peers and mentors, including through learning communities, and to match practices to these emerging standards of performance.
	Sustainable Funding Model	Operate within a sustainable funding model.

By Us and For Us: A Story of Early Childhood Development Systems Change and Results in a Rural Context

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Introduction

Coös is New Hampshire's largest and most rural county, bordering Canada, Maine, and Vermont. Coös has many assets, including a long-standing tradition of civic engagement that crosses socio-economic lines, beautiful natural resources, and a once-vibrant, woods-based economy. Until dairy farm and mill closures caused by the decline of the paper industry in the 1990s, generations of farmers, educators, loggers, and mill workers lived and stayed in Coös, building prosperous communities and a strong social fabric.

Today the region faces challenges stemming from decades of economic decline, resulting in significant job loss and out-migration of youth. An aging demographic, high rates of substance use and domestic violence, and inadequate public funding for education also challenge the region. Median family income is 30 percent lower than the state average and one in five Coös children lives in poverty; the county suffers high unemployment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014) and only 18 percent of adults have a college degree, compared to 35 percent statewide (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). And Coös, like all counties in New Hampshire, faces public funding constraints owing to the state's limited tax base.

Coös' size and social capital, however, create opportunity for population-based interventions that make a difference. The county has just 1,257 children ages birth to 5 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Coös ranks third highest

Key Points

- Since 2007, the Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund — a donor-advised fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation — has invested in early childhood development in Coös County — New Hampshire's largest and most rural and economically disadvantaged county. Community providers from a range of disciplines formed strong professional relationships and agreed on common goals and evidence-based strategies to improve services for children and families.

- This article describes how local community members joined forces with the fund to create an integrated early childhood development system for Coös' children and families. It provides background on the investment and initiative strategy, summarizes key results, and outlines lessons for funders and others pursuing systems change efforts in early learning, in rural areas, or more broadly.

- With increasing interest in strategies to promote childhood resilience, school readiness, and community revitalization, Coös County's rural story of relationship and community systems change can inform the field.

among New Hampshire counties in degree of social association (County Health Rankings and Roadmap, 2018); self-reliance and recognition of the importance of working together are deeply seated values. These strengths create fertile ground for Coös' residents and a place-based funder to work together.

The Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund — a donor-advised fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation (NHCF) — recognized these strengths and saw opportunity in Coös County. Focusing on northern New Hampshire and surrounding communities in the U.S. and Canada, the fund's mission is to serve as a catalyst for moving the region toward sustainable communities and economic development through investments in long-term solutions as well as compassionate support for present, critical community needs. The fund's guiding principles support locally designed and embedded community change; $3.5 million in annual grantmaking makes the Tillotson Fund one the nation's largest rural funders (Cohen, 2013).

This case study describes how local community members joined forces with the fund to create an evidence-driven, high-quality, integrated early childhood development system for Coös' children and families. It provides background on the investment and initiative strategy, summarizes key results, and outlines lessons for funders and others pursuing systems change efforts in early learning, in rural areas, or more broadly.

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Initiative

The Tillotson Fund was established and began responsive grantmaking in 2006 to improve quality of life in the Coös County region. One of its first grants, in 2007, was to the Coös Family Support Project (CFSP) — six organizations that came together to improve outcomes for young children and families. Family Resource Center, a nonprofit organization; Northern Human Services, a mental health care provider; two health centers; and a hospital together received $300,000 over three years to identify opportunities, common goals, and changes necessary to improve services and outcomes for young children and their families. The grant to the CFSP was instrumental in learning more about the capability of local practitioners and the potential for a different kind of investment.

The Coös early childhood strategy was shaped by multiple conversations with local practitioners

This case study describes how local community members joined forces with the fund to create an evidence-driven, high-quality, integrated early childhood development system for Coös' children and families.

and outside influencers, including the Invest Early rural early childhood initiatives from the Blandin Foundation (n.d.a, n.d.b); research on the health, social and economic return of preschool investments (Bernanke, 2007; Campbell, Conti, Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Pungello, & Pan, 2014; Grunewald & Rolnick, 2003; Heckman, 2017; Heckman, Grunewald & Rolnick, 2003; Rolnick & Grunewald, 2008); research on effective interventions for young children (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007) and early childhood trauma and building resilience (Centers for Disease Control, 2014); and examinations of place-based early childhood initiatives by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2008) and others. The strategy also took into account local community improvement goals, including the CFSP's plan, *From Silos to Systems: Improving Outcomes for Families and Children in Coös County* (McDowell, 2008). Together, these inputs formed the basis of a new, proactive funding approach in Coös: collaborative, cross-sector capacity building to support better practice and outcomes for young children and families.

In the midst of the 2008 recession, the fund recognized a need to do something bolder to catalyze long-term economic and community development in the region. It reached out and listened to local residents and field experts, and explored investment approaches with community stakeholders. The fund launched a $5 million Early Childhood Development (ECD) investment strategy in 2009, along with a complementary initiative, Entrepreneurship and Business Development (EBD). The EBD

FIGURE 1 Targeted Investment Logic Model
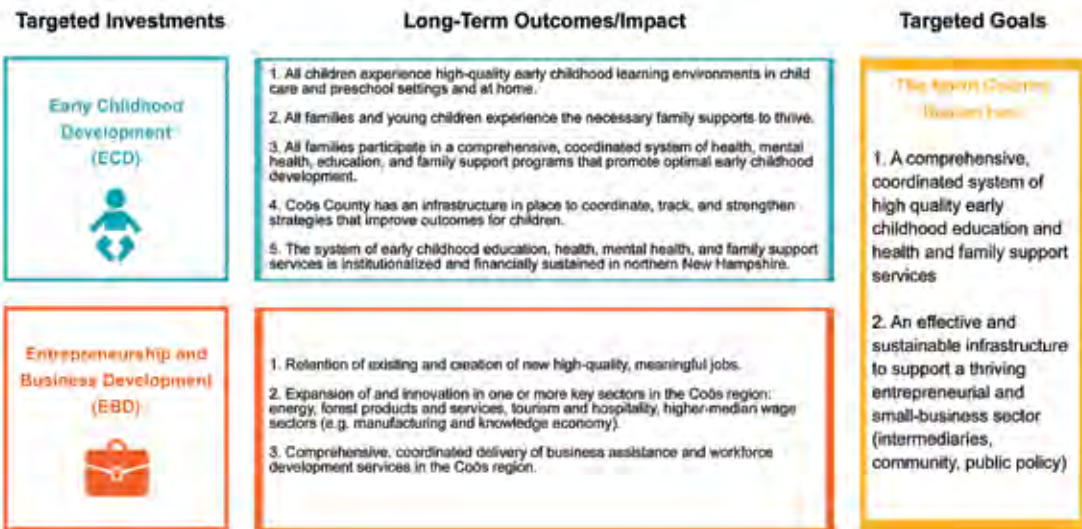
initiative focuses on economic revitalization and strengthening current workforce; ECD invests in Coös' future workforce by strengthening early learning and development. (See Figure 1.) This two-generation approach to cross-sector capacity building aims to make Coös County a great place to live, work, and raise a family. By 2021, the fund's investment in ECD will exceed $10 million.

Strategy and Timeline

The ECD's goal is to improve the social-emotional health and well-being of children from birth to age 8 in Coös County. (See Figure 2). Building on the CFSP's progress and partnerships, the ECD strategies are to build capacity and embed evidence-based practice within organizations and across disciplines to promote optimal early childhood development. Core operating support and capacity-building have encompassed 73 percent of the fund's ECD investment to date. Organizations receiving multiyear grants included:

- Northern Human Services (NHS), to develop infant/early childhood mental health capacity and expand evidence-based practice and services in three communities, serving all of Coös County;

- Coös Director Network, to resource infrastructure that supports quality in licensed child care centers, adoption of best practices, staff training, credentialing, and accreditation;

- CFSP (later, the Coös Coalition for Young Children and Families), to resource infrastructure that supports the ECD partners' work toward shared systemwide goals, training, and improvement activity;

- Plymouth State University, White Mountains Community College, Lyndon State College, and Granite State College, to provide early childhood teacher training, technical assistance, and financial aid through direct scholarships; and

- three county public school systems, to improve preschool-to-school transition.

In the early years of the ECD's work, the fund provided support for relationship-building among initiative partners, including biannual, two-day meetings to build trust and momentum. Participants pointed to this time together spent learning and sharing as critical to ECD's direction and success.

FIGURE 2 ECD Timeline

As ECD gained momentum, a yearlong intensive process facilitated by the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University led to its first five-year strategic plan. The planning process was significant in four ways:

1. It was highly inclusive, with input from local providers, parents, schools, and policymakers.

2. National experts helped locals craft an innovative, evidence-based approach.

3. It broadened participation beyond the CFSP, creating the Coös Coalition.

4. It resulted in a population goal and common system strategies: strengthening social-emotional development and outcomes for all Coös children from birth to age 5 and their families. This goal was selected because all partners had a clear role to play in promoting social-emotional development of young children as part of their organizational mission.

Coös Coalition functions as a backbone organization in ECD — supporting cross-discipline collaboration among early childhood providers in health, mental health, family support, and child care. This interagency backbone function is a key component of systems change through collective impact: the Coös Coalition, the Director Network, and NHS support ECD with dedicated staff, a structured process, a common ECD agenda and progress measures, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among participants (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Improving System Quality, Outcomes, and Scale
ECD supports cross-discipline efforts to bring about early childhood systems change by building:

• organization and system capacity,

• leadership capacity,

• partnerships within and across organizations,

• systemwide adoption of evidence-based curriculum and practice,

• opportunities for shared training across organizations, and

• capacity to continuously learn, evaluate, and improve.

FIGURE 3 The Pyramid Model

The Pyramid Model for Supporting Social-Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (Pyramid Model Consortium, 2016) guides ECD systems change. (See Figure 3.) The model provides a tiered framework of evidence-based interventions for promoting the social, emotional, and behavioral development of young children (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003; Hemmeter, Ostrosky, & Fox, 2006).

Throughout ECD, all partners worked individually and together to incorporate the Pyramid Model through adoption of four evidence-based practices to support healthy social-emotional development and provide seamless, high-quality developmental services to young children and families:

1. Developmental screening — Watch Me Grow (n.d.) guidelines for developmental screening using the Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ and ASQ-Social Emotional) administered by all ECD providers and disciplines.

2. Maternal depression screening — proactive use of the Patient Health Questionnaire

(PHQ-2 or PHQ-9) by mental health, Family Resource Center, and health care providers to identify, refer, and treat caregivers who screen positive for depression.

3. Evidence-based curriculum for providers — training of early-care professionals in evidence-based curriculum and strategies to support healthy social and emotional development.

4. Evidence-based parenting curriculum and practice — training families to support children's social and emotional development using Growing Great Kids, an evidence-based curriculum (Great Kids, Inc., 2018); and assessing that support with a developed Universal Parenting Assessment (UPA), administered by the NHS, home-visiting agencies, and child care centers. (See Table 1.)

A second strategic plan was created by ECD leaders and community in 2016 to reinforce the ECD strategies and expand its reach to all children birth to age 8 and their families. Work with children ages 5 to 8 is focused on bridging

TABLE 1 ECD Evidence-Based Programs, Curricula, and Tools

Programs	Training	Screening/Observation Tools
• Growing Great Kids (GGK) Curriculum • Triple P Positive Parenting Program • Helping the Noncompliant Child • Healthy Families America (HFA) Program • Parents as Teachers • Mindfulness Social/Emotional Learning • Kindness Curriculum • Creative Curriculum	• Parents Interacting With Infants (PIWI) • Positive Solutions for Families • Pyramid Model Train the Trainer Services • Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) • Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) • Trauma-Informed Care Training	• TPOT • Teaching Strategies Gold (TS-Gold) • Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) • Ages and Stages Questionnaire-Social-Emotional (ASQ-SE2) • Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) • The Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS) • Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) • Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener • Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2 – depression screen) • Edinburgh Depression Screen • Swanson, Nolan, and Pelham Questionnaire (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder screening) • Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT)

services from the preschool to school-age years, building on early learning and social-emotional gains made in the preschool years, and embedding Coös' school systems in the ECD process. Other areas of emphasis include demonstrating outcomes, expanding and embedding a common parenting curriculum across Coös' four home-visiting programs, developing advocacy to improve statewide policy and funding, responding to challenges faced by children and families affected by substance use disorders, and increasing economic security among the county's early childhood workforce.

The Fund's Role

The Tillotson Fund's role in ECD is strategic and intentional. In 2009, fund staff created a targeted investment opportunity and framework, and selected organizations and leaders who could build a new ECD system within that framework. To facilitate systems change, 24 percent of the fund's investment has supported training; coaching; scholarships and financial aid; convening; facilitation; communications; and technical assistance.

Meeting frequently with ECD leaders, the fund stays close to the work. Staff and advisors listen and provide feedback and resources to reinforce collaboration, leadership, and shared ownership of ECD. Progress is assessed though annual grantee outcome measurement, conversations on site with partners, and narrative reporting. In addition, because Tillotson is a donor-advised fund at the NHCF, fund staff were able to benefit from support, expertise, leadership, and shared learning with other colleagues along the way.

FIGURE 4 ECD Outcomes
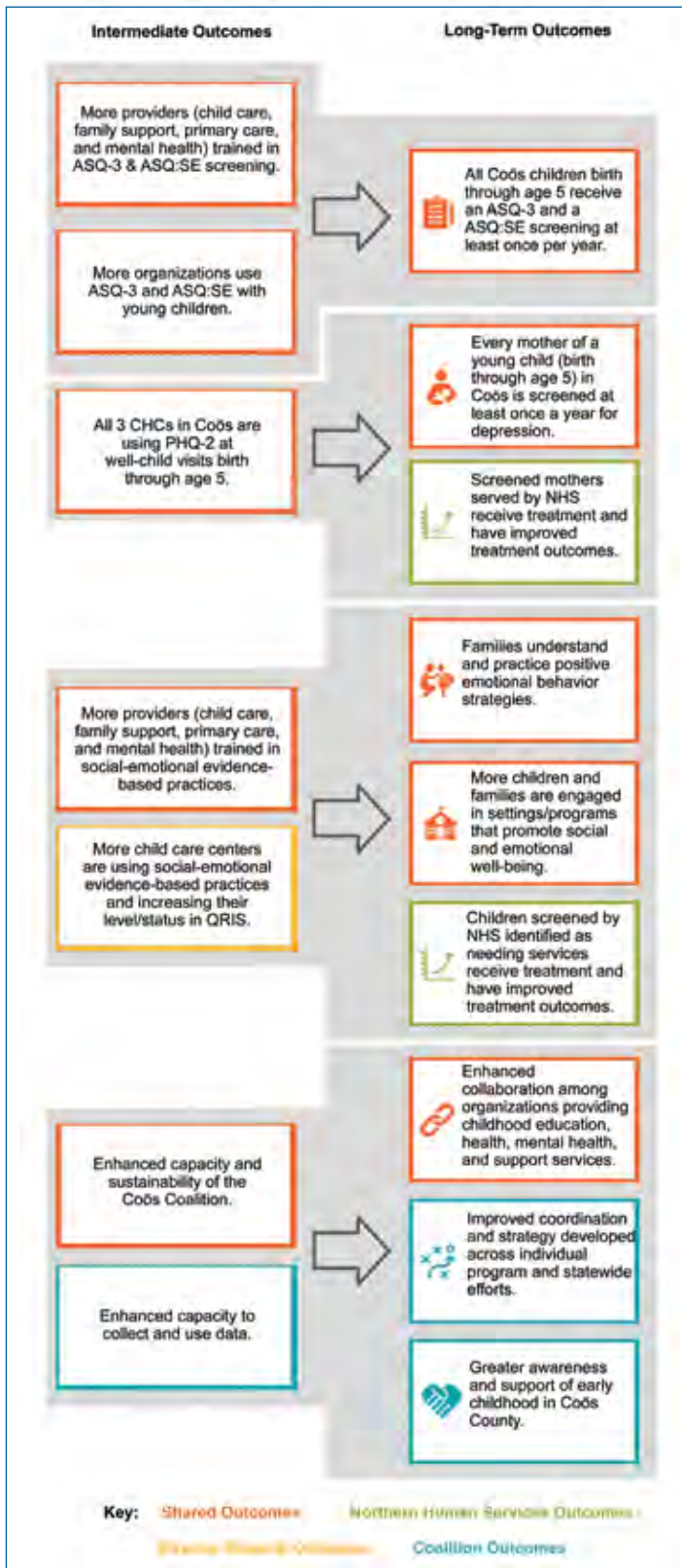
FIGURE 5 The Build Framework

CONTEXT COMPONENTS CONNECTIONS INFRASTRUCTURE SCALE

Progress toward ECD outcomes is well underway. (See Figure 4.) As ECD leaders increasingly influence New Hampshire's early childhood policy and collaborative best practice, Coös County is becoming widely recognized as a leading early childhood development community of practice.

Evaluating ECD

Assessment and responsiveness are core to ECD operations; the fund reinforces learning, flexibility, and relationships. Fund staff and advisors meet with grantees to discuss progress and next steps. From the beginning, the fund invested in the University of New Hampshire Carsey School of Public Policy to provide ongoing evaluation support and technical assistance to ECD grantees and the fund. As it became evident ECD was changing the ecosystem of early childhood services in Coös and beyond, systems change evaluation emerged as a priority.

In 2017 the fund commissioned an independent, retrospective evaluation of ECD systems change, led by Lisa Payne Simon in partnership with Engage R+D. A primary data source was semi-structured interviews (conducted January–May 2018), with 47 participants representing all of the county's early childhood system stakeholders, fund staff, advisors, other local funders, technical experts, policy leaders, and regions modeling ECD. Other data sources included the fund's assessment documentation — grantee reports, program summaries, and Carsey School evaluation reports — spanning nine years, as well as outcome metrics.

The Build Framework (Coffman, 2007) was used as an analytical construct to examine ECD systems change process and impact and to connect the county's diverse efforts to improve early childhood systems. Build is a research-based framework for evaluating initiatives that have

systems change as a key goal and outcome. Interview, process, and outcome data were analyzed for key themes, with the goal of identifying insights relevant for local stakeholders as well as funders and implementers of similar initiatives.

Study strengths feature an inclusive community discovery process. While early evaluation design and data collection limit the ability to measure the full extent of ECD impact since 2009, a compelling story of systems change and community impact emerges from looking across Coös County's quantitative and qualitative data.

Examining Systems Change: An Overview of Key Results

Before ECD, early childhood providers knew one another in Coös County, but services were fragmented and functioned in silos. Beyond crisis intervention and occasional referrals, there was little communication across disciplines and no collaborative focus on quality or training. Child care centers applied a range of early learning strategies (some evidence-based, some not), and quality services, when measured, were not robust. The NHS had no infant mental health or early childhood capacity; children younger than age 5 were rarely seen. Crisis intervention and long waiting lists for mental health services characterized the NHS' capacity. There was limited awareness of early childhood best practices, limited cross-training or communication between NHS departments (including services to individuals with substance use disorders, chronic and severe mental illness, and developmental disabilities), and no local access to child psychiatric services. When child-focused services began at NHS in 2009, they were generally offered only in the clinical setting, with little parent training or support. Community engagement was limited, and child care centers tended to resist involvement from NHS.

FIGURE 6 The Build Framework: Context

Nine years later, ECD has transformed the county's early childhood organizations and systems. NHS has significantly increased community mental health capacity and regional services are led by a specialist in early child development. Collaborating extensively with child care centers and schools, the NHS is a recognized community resource. Coös' early childhood system now has dedicated collaborative infrastructure, a shared agenda, mutually reinforcing activities across disciplines focused on implementing evidence-based practice, and common understanding of how to support social-emotional development (i.e., the Pyramid Model). (See Figure 4.)

According to stakeholders, providers and many Coös residents now recognize the importance of a positive social-emotional foundation and these services are normalized; through referral systems and better communication, children and families are now more likely to receive the help they need. Providers and parents increasingly work as partners in children's social-emotional development.

ECD is also changing systems beyond Coös County; among the best examples is the Framework for Action for New Hampshire's Young Children. Developed by Spark NH, an advisory council created to promote early childhood programs and services throughout New Hampshire, the framework sets forth statewide goals and strategies that intentionally mirror Coös County's ECD strategy. "Our work is their work," observed one Spark NH leader. Spark NH also adopted ECD's data platform, *Visualizing Child Well-Being in Coös County,* to monitor statewide impact of early childhood programs.

Digging Deeper: Applying the Build Framework to ECD

The Build Framework describes the process and impact of systems change, and connect the Coös

community's activities to improve early childhood development. (See Figure 5.)

Context: Influence the environment that affects a system's development and ultimate success. The CFSP — now known as the Coös Coalition — began cultivating the environmental context for a larger ECD investment in 2009 by conducting community outreach, assessing needs related to early childhood development services in Coös County, and convening partners to coordinate rather than add programs. (See Figure 6.)

Today, one of the coalition's key roles is building a supportive community context for ECD. This includes cultivating engagement and nurturing relationships among and between early childhood providers, parents, and the Coös community to support evidence-based practice for healthy social-emotional development. Context activity also increasingly focuses outside of Coös County — sharing ECD's approach with other communities and influencing funders and policymakers to support ECD practice.

Context-building helped pave the way for effective systems change in Coös County. The coalition's inclusive strategy and messaging increased community awareness and value placed on early childhood development. Context-building tools such as the coalition's website (investincooskids.com), county data platform, increased college financial aid for early childhood studies, and annual conferences support a shared ECD vision, population strategy, and understanding of developmental needs and evidence-based practice. Emerging context for ECD in Coös County, statewide, and nationally helped facilitate acceptance of ECD messages and strategies.

FIGURE 7 The Build Framework: Components

Outside of Coös, many ECD practitioners are respected, sought-after advocates; some are serving on nine New Hampshire policy committees. In that capacity, they influence broader systems that reinforce ECD strategy — state policy/programs and private philanthropy. Coös County's model influenced Spark NH's Framework for Action for New Hampshire's Young Children and growth in state funding for early child care (Kieschnick & Milliken, 2015). ECD leaders advising revisions to New Hampshire's Child Care Quality Rating Information System anticipate incorporation of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) as a measure of quality. In 2017, the Coös' Director Network coordinator became New Hampshire's first trained ECERS validator. Coös informs other communities through Spark NH's Communities of Practice collaborative and *Promising Practices Guide,* where Coös County is profiled as model community for developmental screening (Spark NH, 2018).

ECD's direct influence on philanthropy helped inform New Hampshire Tomorrow, a 10-year, $100 million, multifunder investment initiative led by NHCF (n.d.) and intended to lift up early childhood as a state economic development priority and promote ECD best practice. Launched in 2017, the initiative will invest in grants, scholarships, multisector coalitions, and public policy to increase youth opportunity from cradle to career, including early childhood development and education.

Components: Put in place high-quality evidence-based programs, services, or interventions for the system's intended beneficiaries. Improving system components is a major ECD focus. It involves capacity building, raising the level of expertise among providers, coordinating widespread adoption of evidence-based practice and

curricula among providers and parents, and increasing the quality of ECD services, provider capacity to improve, and local leaders' capacity to engage the community and implement practice change. (See Figure 7.)

Systemic training in ECD's four areas of evidence-based practice and development of cross-discipline relationships at the direct care level were achieved through Coös Coalition efforts to increase staff awareness and adoption of ECD practice. For example, NHS trained 100 percent of Infant Mental Health (IMH) staff in early childhood best practice, cross-trained other NHS departments in screening and referral, and implemented policies across the organization to sustain training activity. Core ECD partners also increased provider capacity to reach and educate parents. ECD provides partial funding for all network organization staff members to participate in the evidence-based Growing Great Kids curriculum training, promoting shared language and consistency across organizations' parenting-support strategies. NHS, home-visiting services, and licensed child care centers now deliver and reinforce common evidence-based parenting curricula.

ECD component-building has achieved significant results, creating a new system of high-quality, evidence-based practice. The Coös Coalition has successfully led countywide implementation of developmental screening, maternal depression screening, and adoption of evidence-based curricula and parenting strategies to support healthy social-emotional development in early childhood. The Coös Director Network supports child care center professional development, adoption of evidence-based practice, and improved quality and business operations. The Director Network's annual Center Improvement Plan (CIP) and incentive program, developed

TABLE 2 ECD Results

Social-Emotional Development	Mental Health Services	Early Learning (Director Network)

• Developmental screening: 54% of children age birth to 5 years screened, up from 18% in 2012
 	
• 19% increase in parenting skills (average pre-post scores on Universal Parenting Assessment)
	• 88% of children served by the NHS receive developmental screening, up from 62% in 2016.
	
	• Treatment effectiveness: 13% improvement (better social-emotional skills) at 6-month follow-up.
	
	• 86% increase in maternal depression screening (from 35% screened in 2015 to 65%).
	
	• 68% of parents receive Universal Parenting Assessment.
		• 93% of early learning centers (100% of eligible centers) have either achieved National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation or Licensed Plus status from the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services. This represents a major shift since 2009, when few Coös County centers were NAEYC accredited or held Licensed Plus status.
		
		• Early learning centers complete 30% more NAEYC accreditation standards (compared to 2016).
		
		• Centers complete developmental screening for 62% of enrolled children.
		
		• Centers continue to adopt best practice:
		  ◦ All use TS Gold or Child Observation Record classroom assessments.
		  ◦ 11 adopt ECERS-3 (version 3) self-assessment.
		
		• 9 of 11 eligible centers earn CIP quality performance awards.

by the network directors themselves, reinforces improvement and accountability by incentivizing high performance. The Director Network has achieved major gains in child care center accreditation, licensing, and use of evidence-based curriculum and assessments for early learning. (See Table 2.)

NHS also dramatically increased ECD capacity: adding new IMH staff and services throughout the region, developing trauma-informed care and substance capacity, integrating IMH and developmental services, and supporting a holistic, family-centered approach to treatment and prevention. "ECD is pervasive within NHS," an NHS leader observed. NHS' presence and role in the community is also significantly greater than before ECD. (See Table 2.)

Connections: Focus on what makes a system a system — the integration, linkages, and alignment

between its parts. In addition to building system components, ECD has fostered authentic relationships and connections across early childhood disciplines to create better integration and a more seamless network of support for young children and families. This involved trust and relationship-building; strengthening collaboration among providers; building effective partnerships across disciplines; and creating forums for cross-sector planning and collaboration. All providers have worked to improve system referrals and integration. (See Figure 8.)

Stronger relationships and dedicated meeting times among providers have helped implement coordinated best practice and improve families' access to services. The Coös Coalition fosters use of data-sharing agreements supporting referrals and integration. The NHS expanded community-based consultation for early identification of mental health needs and prioritized referrals

FIGURE 8 The Build Framework: Connections

FIGURE 9 The Build Framework: Infrastructure

from maternal depression screenings to expedite treatment. The NHS, health centers, and others created shared systems to track screening and treatment follow-up. Better cross-sector integration supports earlier identification and access to services; developmental outcomes improve when children and families obtain needed services sooner. Without investing in time and facilitated convening, these trusting relationships would likely not have developed, thereby undermining the ability to collaborate and develop shared system alignment.

Infrastructure: Build critical supports for system functioning. Creating system infrastructure is another ECD focus, and support for ECD collaborative operations, governance, and centralized data collection are roles of the Coös Coalition and Director Network. (See Figure 9.)

The coalition facilitates and supports a leadership team comprised of leaders from member organizations and collaborative ECD activity. Coordinating ECD goals across disciplines, the coalition's work is structured around five working groups and five regional teams. A part-time manager handles coalition operations and a coalition leadership team meets monthly to review collaborative strategies, assess progress, and identify emerging community trends.

The Director Network convenes 14 of Coös County's 15 licensed child care centers each month and conducts an annual child care

summit focused on professional development for all centers and staff. A part-time coordinator staffs convening, training, CIP, and incentive program activities. Two co-directors provide Director Network leadership; one represents the network on the coalition leadership team.

Building infrastructure to support ECD systems also involved setting standards and goals, institutionalizing best practice and barrier reduction, developing monitoring systems, and promoting system sustainability. Critical supports included two strategic plans (each with multiyear goals and a road map for activity), ECD's web site, and the county data platform for community engagement. Policies for training and service delivery helped institutionalize developmental screening and other ECD best practices. The Coös Coalition maintains a staffed, centralized developmental-screening data collection system that feeds into the state system, and a separate ECD outcomes reporting system. As a result of this initiative, the NHS' electronic medical records system facilitates developmental and maternal-depression screening, referral, and follow-up. The NHS also added new IMH, substance abuse, and trauma-informed care infrastructure throughout the county. The Director Network institutionalized quality improvement goals, standards, and incentives through its role and annual CIP activity. Institutionalized ECD infrastructure helps spread and sustain best practice and improve developmental outcomes for children and families.

FIGURE 10 The Build Framework: Scale

Scale: Ensure a comprehensive, quality system is available to as many intended beneficiaries as possible. Since 2009, the Tillotson Fund and partners have worked to expand reach among the target population and sustain community engagement in ECD. The Coös Coalition also supports ECD expansion through advocacy for favorable state policy and financing. (See Figure 10.)

Coös County is making strong progress toward increasing scale. In 2017, 54 percent of Coös children ages birth through 5 received developmental screening, up from 18 percent in 2012.[1] In Coös County, 60 percent of children/families have likely experienced one or more ECD interventions. Expanding the ECD target population in 2016 from all Coös children ages birth through 5 to all children ages birth through 8 and their families expanded program reach to a larger population and broadened ECD's engagement with public schools. Today, all Coös County mental health providers, all its school systems, nearly all its physical health and family-support service providers, 14 of Coös 15 licensed child care centers, and three of the county's four home-visiting/family support agencies actively participate in ECD. Growth in awareness of ECD also continues. One stakeholder observed, "Coös showing what's possible inspired new statewide philanthropic investment to promulgate early childhood best practice, strategies, and goals aligned with ECD."

Insights and Lessons Learned

ECD supports inclusive community-driven systems change governed by a collaborative community network. The Coös Coalition represents dozens of early childhood providers and organizations; at least 75 professionals regularly collaborate to implement ECD. A second collaborative, the Coös Director Network, supports licensed child care centers reaching 31 percent of Coös children ages birth through 5. Through its changing role, the NHS reaches more children in the general population, in home, school, child care center and community settings, and more families receive training in parenting for healthy social-emotional development. More students received financial aid for professional development and associate and bachelor's degrees in ECD. Through this multipronged approach and the 2016 long-term goal targeting all Coös children ages birth through 8 and their families, the county is poised to dramatically increase ECD's reach.

Lessons from ECD can help inform other communities and funders seeking to cultivate systems change to support early childhood development. The Tillotson Fund and the Coös community identified a number of guidelines for effective systems change.

Change Is Community-Driven

"By us and for us in Coös County" is how local leaders describe ECD. Leadership of ECD remains within the community; it is locally staffed and community-based. The fund functions as catalyst, advocate, and trusted partner, providing guidance, technical support, and essential funding focused on a research-based conceptual framework with clear outcomes.

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[1] For context, Blandin Foundation's Invest Early initiative increased developmental screening rates among children ages birth through 4 in rural Itasca County from 26 percent in 2006 to 47 percent in 2015.

A good example of this autonomy is the Director Network CIP, which allows early child care centers in ECD the flexibility to focus on improvement where they see a need, drawing from a menu of best-practice options and National Association for the Education of Young Children standards. This structure makes CIP meaningful: As one network leader observed, "CIP shows centers that the fund values their ideas, their autonomy to set priorities for themselves, and their achievement within the CIP structure." This strategy also promotes a culture of improvement. Two years ago, centers declined the ECERS assessment; they considered it too onerous. Today, they embrace it. A trained Coös ECERS validator assesses classroom practice and gives direct feedback. "The directors' willingness to incorporate the ECERS assessment is evidence of an emerging culture maintained by passionate practitioners who go above and beyond to improve program quality," remarked NHCF program staff member, Phoebe Backler.

The fund also remains flexible and responsive to community-determined needs. For example, in response to Coös' struggle with opioid use, ECD increased funding to support young children impacted by substance use and crisis. Provider and teacher training in trauma-informed care is just one evidence-based practice adaptation in ECD.

Invest in System Infrastructure

The fund invests deeply in collaborative infrastructure for effective community-driven change. Two infrastructures coordinate and support all ECD activity: the Coös' Coalition supports cross-sector collaboration, and the Director Network supports practice change and integration of child care within Coös' ECD system. Both infrastructures support widespread training and adoption of evidence-based practice, capacity building and improvement, linkage across disciplines, and community outreach. A related driver of effective systems change is investment in capacity. "ECD is not a funded program. It creates institutional capacity embedded in organizations and systems of care," observed Charles Cotton, former Area Director at NHS.

> *Leadership of ECD remains within the community; it is locally staffed and community-based. The fund functions as catalyst, advocate, and trusted partner, providing guidance, technical support, and essential funding focused on a research-based conceptual framework with clear outcomes.*

Establish and Sustain Long-Term Vision and Support

"Systems change required a steadfast focus on implementing evidence-based practice over time," observed one ECD participant; "it required leadership and a systems approach." Given ECD's long view, interim goals became important milestones — for example, creating a high-quality early childhood development system accessible to all Coös children is a milestone in reaching all Coös children and families. ECD grantees report annually on interim goals and performance measures.

Maintaining focus required steady, multiyear operating support for ECD grantees and support for infrastructure, convening, strategic planning, communications, advocacy, training, and technical assistance. "These functions are the glue that hold ECD together," one participant noted. Key to effective systems change, technical assistance financed by the fund included best-practice identification, training, practice coaching, facilitation, logic modeling, business operations support, and communications and web development. Identification of technical assistance needs and local access to expertise are managed by the Coös Coalition, the Director Network, and the fund. Given Coös County's largely fee-for-service-based reimbursement system for early childhood services, Tillotson

Documenting the story and results of ECD through an independent evaluation is viewed as one mechanism for helping stakeholders recognize progress made and the ongoing value of this work.

grants, participation stipends, and CIP incentives — up to $4,750 a year for high-performing centers — make ECD's focus on prevention and early intervention possible.

Process Is Important

In ECD, systems change happened at the speed of trust.[2] Early in ECD, the fund allowed time for building trust and relationships that could lead to secure partnerships and overcome resistance to change: "You can't skip this part," one Coös leader observed. Others noted:

- "Be willing to leave agency self-interest at the door in service of a larger shared purpose."

- "Be clear about what you can and cannot commit to in a collaboration."

- "Communication is key. Keep talking about what works and doesn't work. Share successes."

- "Start with achievable goals."

Build Momentum

Coös Coalition identified developmental screening as a shared goal all could embrace. Looking ahead, there is concern about implications of leadership changes for ECD's momentum. The hope is that with systems in place, owned by teams, and a shared strategy and infrastructure to continue support, these transitions will be

successfully navigated. Documenting the story and results of ECD through an independent evaluation is viewed as one mechanism for helping stakeholders recognize progress made and the ongoing value of this work.

Learn From What Did — and Didn't — Work: Program Lessons

- Early in ECD, the coalition adopted the Triple P Positive Parenting Program, purchasing materials and conducting widespread training. While the program added value, training costs made it ultimately difficult to sustain. The coalition is now better positioned to identify a sustainable community curriculum.

- Created by the Director Network, a child care center substitute-teacher pool evolved into a teacher-hiring pool that ultimately could not be sustained due to substitutes being hired for permanent positions in the centers. Scholarships for teacher training were initiated to improve teacher supply.

- Multiyear ECD investment and commitment to grantees is more effective in fostering engagement than single-year investments, particularly with public schools.

- Turnover among early childhood teachers remains high in Coös County. The fund responded by seeking to address economic barriers teachers face.

Learn From What Did — and Didn't — Work: Funder Lessons

- Intentional time spent with grantees — with an eye toward listening and understanding the work, the progress, and the challenges — helps improve grantmaking and commitment.

- ECD's model includes dedicated multiyear funding (committed for five years, then three years, and then another five years)

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[2] While often attributed to Stephen Covey, no authenticated reference to this can be found.

with flexibility built in to address system and capacity-building needs as they evolve. The fund supports risk-taking: "allow[ing] things to develop without knowing exactly where they will go," observed Catherine McDowell of the Coös Coalition for Young Children and Families.

- The Coös Coalition's model of shared vision and collaboration across sectors — through work groups and by region — is an effective structure fostering connections and systems change.

- Drivers of ECD's success include an intentional framework; a long-term, leadership role for funders and presence for fund staff; a work plan; collaborative infrastructure; and a place-based approach in the community.

- With parallel ECD and EBD targeted investments, fund staff envisioned the two collaborating toward integrated, multigenerational, regional impact. Ultimately, the sectors, personalities, and activities proved sufficiently different so that the efforts moved apart; each, however, evolved through lessons learned from the other. After EBD's first investment period, it became clear it could benefit from the systems change model applied in ECD. Collective impact taught the fund how to invest differently and promote regional system change and capacity building in this and other areas of its work.

Challenges, Impact, and Sustainability

ECD has achieved significant systems change and impact. Nevertheless, ECD is a long way from its goal of reaching 100 percent of children in the region, and real challenges remain. For example, while both the Coös Coalition and the Director Network have identified partial outside support, Tillotson funding remains critical to operations. Over time, the NHS' nonbillable community activities have generated billable services and contracts with Head Start and schools. Today, the NHS has nearly a one-to-one match of reimbursement income to grant funding, but

The fund is piloting a matched savings program, with eligible withdrawals addressing the most pressing economic concerns faced by the workforce, and financial advising for Director Network educators.

flexible operating support remains essential to generate that income. Participants observed that fee-for-service reimbursement cannot adequately sustain ECD's focus on prevention. Accountable care or other cross-sector capitated payment might better support ECD's aligned, multidisciplinary, Pyramid Model approach to population health. Another challenge is New Hampshire's opioid epidemic. Maintaining focus on the tenets of ECD — prevention, avoidance of blame, community support — is essential to address this problem, but also challenging in a highly disruptive public health crisis.

And while child care centers are continuing to make gains in quality, they acknowledge room for improvement. Home-based care providers are not yet included in the systems changes. Another fundamental challenge to systems change is the workforce stability and economic security of early child care — teacher retention and a livable wage. Even with a substantial investment in financial aid for bachelor's degree attainment in ECD, graduating students and staff often leave for higher teacher salaries outside of early child care. The fund is piloting a matched savings program, with eligible withdrawals addressing the most pressing economic concerns faced by the workforce, and financial advising for Director Network educators. Recent advocacy efforts are also strengthening ECD infrastructure statewide, reinforcing local efforts like those in Coös County.

Coös is a rural, high-need, and large geographic setting. ECD providers and the fund share a sense of responsibility to solve the county's problems in resourceful ways. Coös' residents frequently collaborate to get things done, but sharing of financial resources and genuine coordination required trust, strong ECD leadership, and shared vision. Coös' small population also provides a uniquely rural opportunity to implement countywide systems change through a population approach.

The fund reinforces ECD impact and sustainability in three key ways, first by embedding evidence-based practice and training. Even if ECD funding ceased, training and capacity for evidence-based practice are deeply embedded in Coös County's early childhood system. Second, a decade of state policy and funder outreach by ECD has influenced the broader early childhood system environment, funding, and support for social-emotional well-being. And third, efforts are underway to reinforce the economic security of Coös' teachers and system reimbursement. The fund is exploring models other than fee-for-service that might better sustain ECD's focus on preventive, accessible, quality services.

Conclusion

ECD's significance is its population strategy, tenure, aspirational goals, and inclusive process in a rural setting. A collective impact effort ("by us and for us in Coös County"), ECD has achieved dramatic early childhood systems change in a 10-year period by creating community capacity, a culture of collaboration and improvement, and transforming Coös' early childhood organizations — creating an integrated, high-quality system for early learning and development where none existed before. All stakeholders note the importance of the Coös Coalition emerging from ECD and the impact it has had on early childhood development systems and practice in Coös. Another key driver is the fund's guided, targeted investment over 10 years. Other impact drivers include the Tillotson Fund's deep commitment to place and willingness to learn and listen. Looking ahead, the fund will continue adaptation through lessons learned and continue ECD investment and efforts to reinforce

reimbursement, funding, and policy support. Meanwhile, ECD is influencing state policy and regional collaboratives aiming to model what Coös County has done, attracting increased public investment in early childhood systems at the state level.

ECD highlights a long-term collaborative process, the central role of community partners in systems change, and a placed-based funder's approach to strengthening community by investing in early childhood. With growing interest in strategies to promote childhood resilience, school readiness, and community revitalization, Coös' story of inclusive, rural, community systems change can inform the field.

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A New Tool for New Times? Using Geographic Information Systems in Foundations and Other Nonprofit Organizations

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Tools

Introduction

The use of geographic information systems (GIS) is relatively new to nonprofit organizations. Ward and Never (2012) describe the nonprofit sector as the "last frontier" for the adoption and use of GIS, following government (where GIS was first deployed) and, later, private business. Sieber (2000) concurs: "Increasingly nonprofits are following the lead of public agencies and private industry by implementing a GIS" (p. 15). Research on GIS displays the same time lag in regard to nonprofits. According to Bishop (2010), "diffusion and acceptance of geographic information systems (GIS) technology is not fully understood in public or private organizations, and even less is known about the role of GIS in the nonprofit sector" (p. 991). Al-Kodmany (2012) is more direct:

> There has been a wealth of articles and books on GIS in nonprofit organizations produced during mid-1990s and early 2000s. However, we find that there is a literature gap afterward. There are fewer articles and books on this topic since 2005 onwards. Recent research asserts that there has been little attention on utilizing GIS by the nonprofit sector (p. 279).

The stimulus to our research is Al-Kodmany's further admonition that "funders of foundations and governments have been reluctant to pay for GIS activities and there is a need for research that investigates the value of using GIS in these organizations" (2012, p. 279). Although we disagree in part because we find substantial research on GIS

Key Points

- The literature on nonprofit organizations exhorts them to understand and develop their communities' strengths and capacities. Yet, identifying those communities, appreciating the conditions that affect them, and integrating organizational stakeholders can pose difficulties for any nonprofit, including foundations.

- This article examines how a tool relatively new to nonprofits — geographic information systems — can be used to support community building by bringing together different stakeholders. A geographic information system is designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present spatial or geographic data, thus allowing an organization to map its community and share that visualization with its stakeholders.

- This article also shows how geographic information systems can assist foundations and other nonprofits in identifying and strengthening their communities by mobilizing the resources dedicated to core issues and improving relations and knowledge-sharing between nonprofit administrators and their various stakeholders. It discusses how geographic information systems tools can help to build community while illustrating the challenges involved with implementing, using, and sustaining it in the nonprofit sector.

use in government, our search of the literature could find no such treatment dedicated to foundations. Our purpose here is to begin to address this gap.

This article demonstrates how GIS can assist foundations and other nonprofit organizations. We begin with a description of GIS technology, and next consider its value to these entities. We then turn to questions of access to GIS and discuss the movement toward Public Participation Geographic Information Systems. We illustrate the challenges involved with adopting and implementing GIS and conclude by considering its sustainability as a tool for foundations and other nonprofit organizations.

Geographic Information Systems

"GIS is a computer technology that enables storage, analysis, and mapping of a wide range of geographic information, including demographic, socio-economic, housing, crime, environmental, and land-use data" (Elwood & Leitner, 2003, p. 140). GIS can be used to associate conditions and other phenomena (e.g., employment, volunteer activity, school performance) with their spatial locations. Users, policymakers, funders, lay citizens, and other audiences can view, manipulate, and query geographic phenomena through GIS technology to address questions ranging from the most particular — such as the locations of the nearest day care centers, job training facilities, or food pantries — to the most profound, such as the effectiveness of local funders, including foundations, in ameliorating social problems or preparing for natural or human-originated disasters.

Among the primary reasons for the growing popularity and use of GIS technology in nonprofit and other organizations are the great range and variety of data that these systems can accommodate, and their ability to display and query this information seamlessly in arresting visual maps that capture important neighborhood or other geographic conditions simultaneously. Consider, for example, a government agency or a nonprofit that might well want to know where police, fire, and emergency medical service units are located so as

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to meet the needs of all areas encompassing a jurisdiction, particularly those at high risk of health hazards and criminal victimization, and the recommended traffic routes and estimated times to provide assistance to them. Only a few years ago, to appreciate such complex and essential questions of the "geography" of public (and nonprofit) policy might have required, at best, several bulky overlays of different information or dense statistical indicators, or, at worst, mere speculation. By contrast, a few keystrokes in a well-appointed GIS can be used to visualize and address such problems on a high-resolution computer monitor at whatever density and detail and with whatever additional factors desired by the user.

The lacuna in our knowledge with regard to GIS use and potential for foundations and other nonprofits is unfortunate (Al-Kodmany, 2012). Extant research suggests that GIS can assist nonprofits in several important aspects, such as mapping, decision-making, planning, productivity, reports and proposals, asset identification,

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advocacy, and efficiency (Ward & Never, 2012; Al-Kodmany, 2012; Bishop, 2010). Moreover, Brudney, Russell, and Fischer (2017) show that GIS can help nonprofit organizations in their crucial challenge to identify and build their communities. According to Sieber (2000), "benefits range from operational efficiencies, such as increased cartographic capacity; operational effectiveness, such as improved information access; program effectiveness, such as augmented decision making; and contribution to well-being, such as the delivery of social justice" (p. 18). Given the high demands placed on nonprofits and the limited resources typically available to them, they can ill afford to overlook the potential advantages of GIS technology.

Advantages of GIS for Foundations

Our review of the literature failed to uncover treatments of GIS with primary reference to foundations. Although several articles allude to the possible relevance of GIS for public and private funding agencies such as foundations, they do not devote sustained attention to the topic (e.g., Elwood & Leitner, 2003; Al-Kodmany, 2012; Bishop, 2010). Despite this neglect, we show that GIS has substantial advantages that foundations should consider.

Perhaps the major advantage for foundations in adopting and sustaining GIS is better knowledge and grasp of the community they seek to serve as these organizations define it. Brudney et al. (2017) explain that GIS applications allow, if not require, host organizations to identify their target communities for visual display and related purposes. Accordingly, foundations must make several crucial decisions that ultimately influence, and likely dictate, the features of their GIS: They must first determine the spatial boundaries of the area or "community" to be included in the GIS mapping; the type of community characteristics, conditions, and organizations to be represented in the mapping; and the information to be collected and displayed when users perform queries. This information is typically specified and included as different "layers" in the GIS mapping — for example, the location of job training centers, air quality measures across different parts of the community, or areas designated as food deserts by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

As Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) recommend, foundations can use GIS technology to comprehend visually the needs and assets of their community of interest. From this assessment the foundation can readily identify the prime target areas for the types of resources and initiatives it has the capability and motivation to deliver — whether the goal is to ameliorate weaknesses or increase strengths. In Kretzmann and McKnight's memorable phrase (and book title), GIS can help foundations in *Building Communities From the Inside Out.*

Second, and closely related, with the target community identified GIS can specify where foundation initiatives may have made a difference and/or where greatest challenges remain. Whether the goal of the foundation is to sustain greater recreational opportunities for residents, support services for single-parent families, job training for unemployed teenagers, accessibility of recycling or renewal facilities, preservation of historic sites and buildings, or cleaner air or water, once the critical conditions to be affected have been specified, the relevant information can be stored, retrieved, analyzed, and displayed through GIS technology. Thus, foundations can depict visually the locations and progress of their

initiatives, the number of people and groups who take advantage of the opportunities presented by these initiatives as well as the rates of utilization in different geographic areas, and the extent to which the initiatives meet foundation benchmarks.

Equally important, these GIS data can be displayed and analyzed at different points in time, such as before and after an intervention supported by the foundation, to evaluate the progress potentially attributable to the foundation made toward the designated goals. Alternatively, areas served by foundation initiatives can be displayed and compared against other areas not as fortunate to be served to provide a comparison or control group to approximate the progress registered. Such longitudinal and geographic comparison can help to approximate the difficult challenge of demonstrating the effects of an initiative ("moving the needle"), which can prove very persuasive in attracting other funders from business, the nonprofit sector, and government (Bishop, 2010; Nedovic-Budic, 1999). As Elwood & Leitner (2003) observe:

> Finally, many organizations disseminate GIS-based knowledge to funding agencies to illustrate neighborhood needs and to show organizational effectiveness in solving them. … These changing demands include an increasing emphasis on direct service provision tasks and increasingly competitive funding process[es] that require documentation of measurable outcomes (p. 149).

Third, as suggested by these observations, foundations and other nonprofits could benefit from GIS technology to make a professional and convincing case to their own boards of directors as well as other funders. Several researchers discuss the need and expectation of these organizations to collect and present spatial data in coherent and convincing ways to demonstrate not only their accomplishments but also their professionalism (Elwood & Leitner, 2003; Lin & Ghose, 2008; Al-Kodmany, 2012).

In Al-Kodmany's (2012) study of planners and GIS experts in key nonprofit organizations in Chicago, for example:

> Interviewees indicated that GIS makes small nonprofit organizations look far more legitimate on the larger political stage. It has helped to highlight the needs of underserved populations. … In the same vein, visuals are useful for projects' sponsors and funders (p. 292–293).

One respondent in the study stated, "GIS also helps to create a more professional and concise document when reporting to a grant funder or a board of directors," and another asserted that the visualization aspect of GIS is essential: "Without GIS, there would be no easy way to convey such overwhelming information at the macro and micro scales" (Al-Kodmany, 2012, p. 293).

In their research on neighborhood organizations in the cities of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, Elwood and Leitner (2003) similarly observed:

> State funding programs for neighborhood revitalizations, as well as those provided by private philanthropic organizations, increasingly emphasize outcome-based assessment in which tangible outputs must be demonstrated and measured. Nearly every one of the 19 organizations in our study has used GIS to demonstrate to funders the efficacy of their revitalization programs in improving neighborhood conditions. This is not only because of the data management and analysis capabilities of GIS but also because it is seen as a legitimate tool by the public and private institutions to which community organizations are accountable. … The organizations perceive GIS use to be an important strategy for communicating organizational expertise and sophistication, to show funders that the organization "knows what it is doing" (p. 151).

Foundations and other funders have shown increasing interest in pursuing their missions through arranging and supporting the collaborative efforts of nonprofit and community organizations, and even public agencies and private businesses (Brudney, Prentice, & Harris, 2018; Prentice & Brudney, 2016, 2018). A fourth advantage of GIS for foundations is that it can

Once relevant information on nonprofits has been entered into the GIS, including spatial location, National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities classification, mission statement, IRS classification, and financial information, foundations can easily identify organizations (by mission or geographic location, size or assets, etc.) to include in requests for proposals or other initiatives.

facilitate the work of forming and sustaining collaborations with nonprofits and other organizations intended to advance foundation goals. For example, the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) is a collaboration involving the Urban Institute and local partners across the United States to "further the development and use of neighborhood information systems in local policymaking and community building" (NNIP, 2018). Once relevant information on nonprofits has been entered into the GIS, including spatial location, National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities classification, mission statement, IRS classification, and financial information, foundations can easily identify organizations (by mission or geographic location, size or assets, etc.) to include in requests for proposals or other initiatives. For example, if the foundation wanted to structure a collaborative project to stimulate economic development in a particular geographical area, it could use GIS to identify all potentially interested organizations in the area, such as religious institutions, nonprofits, high schools and colleges, private businesses, and government agencies. With the population of organizations specified, the foundation could

evaluate the response to its outreach efforts and determine whether further actions were necessary to motivate greater participation by selected groups. GIS also offers the benefit of displaying visually the locations of participants and other stakeholders who might take an interest in the initiative. These features of GIS would facilitate the formation, operation, and maintenance of collaborations sought by foundations.

Access to GIS: Public Participation Geographic Information Systems

These potential benefits of GIS for foundations notwithstanding, the literature regarding GIS in nonprofits allude to a dark side: Several articles raise the specter that the public — and nonprofit organizations — will be shut out of use of the technology, and that GIS-related data, analysis, and interpretation will revert to the state, thus depriving nonprofits of independent voice in policy discussions and debates. Lin and Ghose (2008) sketch the basis for this view:

> GIS has been criticized as an elitist technology, out of reach for traditionally marginalized citizens, because of its cost and technical complexity.... [I]t is difficult for community organizations to build their own in-house GIS because of the high costs of hardware, software, and GIS training, and drastic budget reductions necessitated by deep cutbacks in federal funding in recent years (p. 32).

Al-Kodmany (2012) agrees that "GIS continues to be an expensive technology; and therefore, it is not a fully accessible tool" (p. 293). Talen (2000) likewise observes:

> [C]onventional use of GIS is largely top-down in the sense that GIS data [are] provided, manipulated, and presented by technical experts. Skepticism about the value of top-down GIS focuses on the issue that certain groups and certain types of local knowledge are marginalized by GIS-based decision-making processes (p. 280).

Citizens' groups and nonprofits typically lack the resources — finances, time, and training — to obtain and support GIS. "These organizations have scarce resources for purchasing data, have limited staff and volunteer time to devote to gathering information and building databases,

and rarely have formal agreements with local government institutions regarding data sharing" (Elwood & Leitner, 2003, p. 144). The vice president of the Conservation International organization lamented, "it's been my experience that as soon as we trained someone in the GIS and they because fairly good at it, that person would be offered a salary three times higher by someone in the private sector" (Al-Kodmany, 2012, p. 294). Although this statement may, unfortunately, ring true for foundations as well, given their mission and standing in the community, foundations likely have greater capacity than individual service-delivery nonprofits to implement and sustain GIS technology.

Researchers raise the concern that although GIS use may create possibilities for nonprofit and community organizations to develop alternative knowledge and practices, without some autonomy in this use GIS could serve as a mechanism through which community organizations are incorporated into the state's agenda and priorities, rather than proposing directions, options, and plans of their own (Elwood & Leitner, 2003; Lin & Ghose, 2008). As a result, the prospect arises that "these future plans often reflect the state's predetermined criteria upon which their performance and fundability are evaluated" (Elwood & Leitner, p. 154).

A proposed approach to address the issue of restricted access and use of GIS by local, neighborhood, and community groups is the movement toward Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS) (Bishop, 2010). These systems seek the use of GIS "to broaden public involvement in policymaking as well as … to promote the goals of nongovernmental organizations, grassroots groups, and community-based organizations" (Sieber 2006, p. 491). Sieber explains that the PPGIS movement has gained momentum because most information used in policymaking has a spatial component, policy-related information can be analyzed and visualized spatially and can be persuasive in policy debates, and extending the use of spatial information to all relevant stakeholders presumably leads to better policymaking. PPGIS incorporates sharing access to spatial data,

A proposed approach to address the issue of restricted access and use of GIS by local, neighborhood, and community groups is the movement toward Public Participation Geographic Information Systems.

analysis, technology, and presentation among those participating in public policy decisions as well as those affected by or having a stake in those decisions. Some researchers go farther in describing the benefits derived from broad public participation through GIS. For example, Talen (2000) advocates "Bottom-Up GIS" or BUGIS, "an approach in which residents use GIS to communicate how they perceive their neighborhood or community, via their description, evaluation, or prescription for their local environment" (p. 279).

Lin and Ghose (2008) conclude that "sustainable provision of GIS in PPGIS remains a difficult but key issue in the effort to democratize an elitist, complex, and expensive technology among disenfranchised citizen groups, given the increasing use of spatial data in planning and policymaking tasks" (p. 42). Foundations could assist in addressing this issue and promoting broader use of GIS by both funding the adoption and maintenance of GIS in nonprofit organizations and by establishing PPGIS of their own for proprietary use as well as by grantees, if not the larger community. Not only would this capability advantage the foundation, it would also allow it to register community progress made by its grantees and other parties by integrating all initiatives, outputs, and outcomes, in the same GIS database and map. That is, rather than receiving a variety of reports from grantees based on a diversity of metrics and geographic scales, access to a common GIS supported by the foundation would allow it to receive and integrate consistent reporting of results. Indeed, Foster-Fishman and Long (2009) use GIS to geo-code the physical location of

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[R]esources (including funding) and resource diversification, training for organizational staff and external stakeholders, and the commitment of diverse stakeholders to the project increase the probability of sustainability of the PPGIS.

minigrant projects and other community-building activities to assess and discern community progress, such as level of resident involvement, organizational engagement in decision-making processes, and strength of neighborhood associations. If, as Sieber (2006) claims, "PPGIS provides a unique approach for engaging the public in decision making through its goal to incorporate local knowledge, integrate and contextualize complex spatial information, allow participants to dynamically interact with input, analyze alternatives, and empower individuals and groups" (p. 503), foundations should give serious attention to adopting and sustaining the technology.

Sustaining GIS and Foundations

Research by Brudney et al. (2017) demonstrates that establishing a GIS is difficult; gaining the support and buy-in of stakeholders is crucial. Sustaining GIS may impose even more obstacles for foundations. Ogilvie, Brudney, and Prentice (2017) examined whether the population of nonprofit organizations that had adopted one type of GIS, Community Platform (CP), a GIS product developed by the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C., had been able to sustain this GIS application. CP is intended to encourage community engagement, support community research, strengthen nonprofit collaboration and effectiveness, and build a distributed community information system. Various community foundations have adopted CP (Ogilvie et al., 2017).

Ogilvie et al.'s (2017) study used semistructured interviews and surveys with representatives of all of the organizations that had adopted CP (n = 21), and is unique and instructive because it reports on the experience of the entire population of nonprofit adopters in sustaining a GIS application. Their results offer a realistic outlook on the prospects for the sustainability of GIS in nonprofits. Of the 21 CP sites, fewer than half (10 sites) were active and could be classified as PPGIS: available to the agency, the public, and other stakeholders to view, access, and use. By contrast, six CP sites had launched but became inactive over a period ranging from one to three years of service. Some of these sites still held static, time-bound data, but since no new information had been added or updated, the authors rightly classified the sites as inactive.

Of the five remaining CP sites, two that had attempted to achieve an active CP site (i.e., a PPGIS), ended up using the software mainly for internal purposes within the organization (i.e., a GIS). One site did not attempt a public launch following the beta-test stage of adoption, and the other attempted to launch an active CP site unsuccessfully for approximately two years prior to the current use, mostly as an internal tool. Another CP site continued in the beta-test stage, in which the CP site is not easily accessible to the general public. The last two organizations attempted to implement CP but were not successful on their own. One site had intended to adopt CP but did not launch it after the organization began deliberations on the CP software and determined that it was not the right tool. The second site chose to consolidate with another site that had launched CP within the same state.

The research by Ogilvie et al. (2017) suggests that the sustainability of a PPGIS is not out of reach, but that it does require a concerted and continuing effort on the part of nonprofit and foundation sponsors. Notably, they found that resources (including funding) and resource diversification, training for organizational staff and external stakeholders, and the commitment of diverse stakeholders to the project increase the probability of sustainability of the PPGIS.

Graddy and Morgan (2006) argue that community foundations must expand their role to survive, shifting their focus from their own institution to the community. Fine, Raynor, Mowles, and Sood (2017) suggest that foundations must maintain a dual focus on their own institution and the community, given the interplay between the two. They contend that environmental learning, wherein a foundation "stays abreast of needs, opportunities, and shifts in relevant environments through connecting to peer funders, the community, and other relevant actors," is key to strengthening the organization's internal adaptive capacity and will result in higher levels of effectiveness and change for the community (Fine et al., 2017, p. 91).

With its outward focus and ability to capture and display important information about the community and the critical institutions, stakeholders, and evolving conditions within it, GIS thus seems a valuable tool for foundations. As we have elaborated, the advantages of GIS include:

1. generating better knowledge and grasp of the community the foundation seeks to serve;

2. specifying where foundation initiatives may have made a difference and where greatest challenges remain;

3. enabling more convincing and professional presentations to make the case for various policies and programs; and

4. facilitating the work of foundations in forming and sustaining collaborations with nonprofit and other organizations.

Moreover, foundation support would provide the basis for PPGIS, which can help to engage the public, community organizations, and nonprofits in decision-making and policy formulation. Research suggests that sustaining GIS presents a challenge to foundations and other nonprofits. In our view, ignoring its potential carries even greater risk.

With its outward focus and ability to capture and display important information about the community and the critical institutions, stakeholders, and evolving conditions within it, GIS thus seems a valuable tool for foundations.

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The Future of GIS in Foundations and Other Nonprofits

Several recent and convergent trends have set the stage for foundations to attain the many benefits of GIS and overcome the associated challenges of sustaining the technology. First, nonprofit staff and directors are more inclined and pressured to use GIS than ever before; second, the costs to obtain, augment for individualized use, and maintain GIS are decreasing; and third, the technical expertise necessary to use GIS is proliferating.

Public- and private-sector organizations utilize GIS for purposes ranging from crime mapping, sustainable development, and public health to landscape architecture, real estate, and civil engineering. Additionally, with the increased accessibility and customization of GIS software to suit particular needs, various for-profit organizations use the technology to support marketing operations. The proliferation of GIS across public and private industries makes technology transfer to the nonprofit sector, and especially to foundations, more likely. Ward and Never (2012) maintain that technology transfers to the nonprofit sector from the private and public sectors via three primary modes: competition with for-profit organizations, collaboration with government, and stakeholder influence. In the first instance, technology transfer occurs in service markets where nonprofits vie with for-profit organizations for resources and clients to remain competitive (e.g., hospitals, higher

education, day care). Where for-profit organizations adopt and use GIS to obtain a competitive advantage, nonprofits will surely follow in their effort to remain relevant and viable. Second, in service markets where nonprofits and government tend to collaborate (e.g., social services), nonprofits are more likely to adopt technologies used by their governmental counterparts to improve information sharing and promote mutual understanding.

Finally, stakeholders facilitate technology transfer from the public and private sectors to the nonprofit sector in two primary ways. First, in service markets where the public sector is the primary funder of nonprofit activity (e.g., human service and health organizations), government has significant leverage to push nonprofits to adopt certain technologies (Cortés & Rafter, 2007). Second, nonprofit board members and foundation trustees, many of whom are selected for service given their professional expertise and access to public and for-profit organizations, use their governance role to influence the transfer of technology as a means to increase the professionalization of nonprofit operations (Ward & Never, 2012).

The second trend that renders future adoption and sustainability of GIS technology in nonprofits more likely is the decreasing costs associated with obtaining GIS software, customizing and updating the software to meet organization- or issue-specific needs, and accessing relevant and valid data. The development of more and better open source GIS software makes the acquisition and customization of these tools for specific applications increasingly possible. GRASS, QGIS, OpenJump, gvSIG, among others, constitute worthy alternatives to proprietary commercial software like ArcGIS. Many of these free and open source software systems offer greater flexibility (e.g., more options and tools) and accessibility (e.g., compatibility with various operating systems and web applications). Likewise, data are easier to access than ever before. Government agencies (e.g., the U.S. Census Bureau, IRS) and nonprofit organizations (e.g., the Urban Institute, ProPublica) are facilitating greater access to useful data.

Even for-profit companies (e.g., Google, Nielsen Holdings) are engaging in "data philanthropy" by gifting certain proprietary data to nonprofit entities to support public goals (McKeever, Greene, MacDonald, Tatian, & Jones, 2018).

Finally, the trend of graduate public affairs programs toward offering more GIS coursework means that the technical expertise necessary to use GIS is proliferating among the cadre of public servants moving into nonprofit and foundation careers. In a recent survey of public affairs programs, Obermeyer, Ramasubramanian, and Warnecke (2016) found that nearly 89 percent of public affairs program representatives rated education in GIS as important for their students; additionally, they found that just over 38 percent of respondents said that their programs offer GIS coursework. These figures represent a notable increase from a 2005 survey that found only 26 percent of public affairs programs offered GIS courses (Haque, 2005). Even more significant is the finding that the vast majority of public affairs programs, whether they currently have GIS coursework or not, plan to add or expand their GIS graduate course offerings in the next two to three years. Some scholars even contend, given GIS's extensive use "throughout the fields that typically comprise a public affairs education" (Obermeyer et al., p. 529), that graduate public affairs curricula should reflect a holistic programmatic approach to GIS inclusion that fully integrates GIS within and between courses to prepare students with "21st-century competencies" (Ferrandino, 2014, p. 542). This trend toward increasing and integrating GIS coursework in public affairs programs will yield more skilled practitioners educated and prepared to go beyond using GIS solely to create colorful maps. Rather, these experts will also be trained to use GIS tools to perform spatial analyses (e.g., spatial regression) to understand the relationships between community characteristics and the factors behind observed geographic patterns.

Taken together, these three trends — rising use of GIS overall and potential for technology transfer to nonprofit organizations, the decreased cost of GIS software and relevant data,

and the increased number of public servants trained in GIS — present a convincing case that nonprofits, and particularly foundations, will be able to make greater use of this valuable technology to increase public participation, incorporate diverse stakeholders, improve organizational operations, increase market efficiencies, and build stronger communities.

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Creating Habits for Inclusive Change

Pennie Foster-Fishman, Ph.D., and Erin Watson, Ph.D., Michigan State University

Introduction

The act of transforming communities requires the mobilization of diverse stakeholders as agents of change: adopting, implementing, and diffusing policy and practice changes in support of collective goals and creating the conditions for transformation within their own spaces and places. This movement to action lies at the heart of effective community change efforts, but it remains one of the most challenging aspects of collective work.

Despite stakeholders' desire for change and despite efforts toward inclusive planning and governance, the actions needed to transform outcomes within communities often do not emerge (Miller & Burns, 2006). Many communities report the lack of action as a significant barrier to change, and funders, initiative leaders, and backbone staff often struggle to determine the best processes to trigger momentum for change and build collective accountability for action. This inaction can have significant negative consequences for collaborative groups, causing some stakeholders to withdraw support and even terminate their involvement (Demant & Lawrence, 2018).

This article presents four processes we have introduced in numerous communities across the United States to create an inclusive culture for action through our work using the ABLe Change Framework.[1] This framework aims to create the community conditions and systems needed to reduce inequities and improve population-level outcomes. Central to the ABLe Change approach is a continuous-transformation model of change (Burnes, 2004): the belief that communities and organizations must have the ability to continuously adapt and improve in order to thrive and

> ### Key Points
>
> - The act of transforming community outcomes requires diverse stakeholders across an array of settings to become actors of change. While this movement to action lies at the heart of effective community change, it also remains one of the most challenging aspects of collective work.
>
> - Drawing from the ABLe Change Framework systems-change model, this article presents four processes used in numerous communities across the United States to effectively engage diverse stakeholders in taking actions to improve local systems. These processes prioritize the voices of the most disadvantaged within communities and engage them as key actors in the change process.
>
> - This article introduces the ABLe Change Framework tools, which are used to promote these action-oriented habits, and then discusses how foundations can use them to create the conditions that promote inclusive community change.

survive. Such an approach is particularly appropriate when tackling complex social problems (Anderson, 1999); the dynamic, unpredictable nature of these problems requires attention to system reactions to change (Olson & Eoyang, 2001) and considerations of system incongruences with change efforts (Coburn, 2003). Effective change pursuits are best able to respond to this complexity when they involve diverse stakeholders, settings, and sectors as active learners and agents of change. Overall, when action becomes the basis for learning and is coupled with opportunities for reflection on the actions taken,

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[1] See http://ablechange.msu.edu.

Change efforts are more likely to succeed when they penetrate vertical and horizontal layers within a community and become integrated into the habits of daily living.

significant personal and systems development can emerge (Checkland & Scholes, 1990).

For these reasons, the ABLe Change Framework engages diverse actors in action-learning processes that are supportive of community change plans and responsive to emergent understandings of community systems (Burns, 2007). In general, these actions work to build the conditions needed for successful community system-change pursuits:

- local system conditions aligned with change goals, including supportive policies and practices, power dynamics, network exchanges, and resource access (Coffman, 2007; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017);

- a climate for effective, equitable implementation, including capacity and readiness for change, effective diffusion of change efforts, and institutional alignment to support action (Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005); and

- a culture for adaptive learning and continuous improvement, including access to relevant data, feedback loops, and stakeholders learning from and taking action on findings (Burns, 2007; Eoyang & Holladay, 2013).

The Need for Action

Change efforts are more likely to succeed when they penetrate vertical and horizontal layers within a community (Coburn, 2003; Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007) and become

integrated into the habits of daily living. For example, when education reforms influence policy and practices within diverse sectors (e.g., early childhood, employment) and saturate multiple layers and spaces within an education system, a "normative coherence" (Coburn, 2003, p. 7) emerges, creating the culture for sustained transformative change (Coburn & Meyer, 1998). Such coherence is more likely to occur when stakeholders representing these different contextual layers and spaces are actively engaged in reform efforts.

Unfortunately, many change initiatives struggle to create this level of engagement. Even when local stakeholders are committed to change goals and when initiatives build the core elements included in many collaboration and collective-impact frameworks (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2009; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Wolff, 2010), the history and context of many communities can create conditions ripe for inaction (Demant & Lawrence, 2018). Take, for example, one statewide early childhood systems-building effort that aimed to engage diverse cross-sector stakeholders in taking the actions needed to create a more effective early childhood system. Evaluation data revealed that despite the relatively high levels of collaborative capacity (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001) present within these 54 coalitions, only 16 percent of the 1,107 members reported that their organization took actions to shift internal policies and procedures in support of collaborative goals (Foster-Fishman, Wattenberg, You, Collins, & McAlindon, 2012). Importantly, the level of action pursued was strongly predictive of success: More action was linked to improvements in service coordination, access to services, and responsiveness to local needs. In fact, some scholars have noted that collaborative efforts need to trigger a tipping point for community change in order to achieve transformative outcomes (Fawcett, Lewis, Paine-Andrews, Francisco, Williams, & Copple, 1997). Actions taken by diverse stakeholders are a necessary precursor to this tipping point.

Challenges to Generating Action for Inclusive Change

In 2010, we started to engage communities tackling a range of social problems in systems-change efforts via our ABLe Change Framework. While communities were eager to embrace a systems-change lens, we were surprised to discover how difficult it was to build change momentum and promote action. Even communities with strong collaborative infrastructures and effective backbone staff struggled to engage diverse stakeholders as actors of change. In our conversations with and surveys of local stakeholders across multiple communities, five common challenges to action consistently appeared:

1. lack of readiness for and resistance to change, including beliefs that change is not desirable, feasible, or necessary (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993). These beliefs often generated significant resistance to change and eroded commitment to action (Edwards, Jumper-Thurman, Plested, Oetting, & Swanson, 2000). These beliefs emerged from stories of the failure of prior initiatives (Lasker, Weiss, & Miller 2001), concerns about the time-consuming nature of community change efforts (Hoey & Sponseller, 2018), and an unwillingness to challenge the status quo, including shifting existing power dynamics (Ryan, 2008; Wolff, Minkler et al., 2017);

2. lack of clarity around the goals or aims of the change effort and the resultant ambiguity around what actions to take to support it (Holt, Armenakis, Feild, & Harris, 2007);

3. lack of engagement from critical stakeholders, most notably the individuals most affected by the targeted problem (Wolff, Minkler et al., 2017), though other critical stakeholders (e.g. business, direct-service delivery providers) were also often excluded. This practice was often supported by the belief that only the "power elite" could enact change (Aragon & Giles Macedo, 2010);

4. norms and practices that value information over action. This emerged as "analysis paralysis," where stakeholders overemphasized the need to further understand data before moving forward (Burch, 2010), also showing up in the format and structure of many collaborative efforts that prioritized information sharing over problem-solving and action; and

5. lack of mutual accountability for action coupled with the fear of failure, including the belief that the "collective" or paid backbone staff would implement change.

Toward the goal of creating an environment that promotes "inclusive action," we have worked to develop social technologies — change processes, ways of working together, and new tools — that can address these barriers (Ryan, 2008) and create new norms or habits where all stakeholders become active agents of change. Communities can use these processes and tools even if they are not working within the ABLe Change Framework. While it is our experience that more action will happen if all of these tools are used because they work synergistically together, the tools can be adopted individually. (See Table 1.)

Critical Process No. 1: Organize Stakeholders Around a Shared Vision

The adoption and pursuit of a shared vision for change is a key ingredient for moving communities to action (Kania & Kramer, 2011), as it provides the direction for change, inspires individuals, and focuses the energies of all collaborative members (Martin, McCormack, Fitzimons, & Spirig, 2014). Importantly, effective community change efforts not only generate commitment to the shared vision across involved stakeholders, but they also work to broaden public will and buy-in, integrating the shared vision across actors and settings throughout the system (ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018). When the vision truly becomes embedded within a community, diverse stakeholders start to pursue aligned actions, creating ripple effects that trigger larger systems changes (Trickett & Beehler, 2017). Overall, developing a shared,

TABLE 1 Sample Tools and Processes to Promote Inclusive Action

Critical Process No. 1: Organize Diverse Stakeholders Around a Generative, Shared Vision for Change			
Process Activity	**Tool**	**Description**	**Value for Promoting Action**
Develop generative vision.	Shared Visioning Agenda[2]	Process agenda for engaging diverse stakeholders in establishing shared agenda	• Develops shared vision across diverse stakeholders • Builds readiness for change • Promotes diverse stakeholders support for change goals
Engage stakeholders in system scanning.	System Scan Design Guide	Step-by-step instructions for designing a system scan	• Ensures system conditions are targeted for action • Incorporates diverse perspectives into system understanding
	System Scan Question Menu	Sample system scanning questions	• Engages diverse stakeholders in system understanding • Promotes critical consciousness and motivation for action
	PhotoVoice guide	Instructions for carrying out a PhotoVoice project	• Promotes value of vulnerable populations' perspective • Promotes critical consciousness and motivation for action
Engage stakeholders in sense making.	ABLe Sense-Making Guide	Methods for engaging diverse perspectives in making sense of system-scan data	• Promotes critical consciousness and motivation for action • Build readiness for change
	Prioritizing Worksheet	Techniques for prioritizing powerful and feasible change targets emerging from system-scanning process.	• Ensures change priorities consider community conditions and needs • Promotes diverse stakeholders support for change goals
Critical Process No. 2: Transform Collaborative Groups Into Systemic Action Learning Infrastructures Where Numerous Diverse Actors Become Agents of Change			
Process Activity	**Tool**	**Description**	**Value for Promoting Action**
Redraw system boundary.	Stakeholder assessment[3]	Heuristic for intentionally identifying potential stakeholders to engage in the change effort	• Expands stakeholders to consider for action and inclusion in infrastructure • Promotes diverse stakeholder support for change goals
Create systemic action infrastructure: • Design the infrastructure • Create feedback loops	Guide to Designing a Systemic Action Learning Infrastructure	Instructions for designing a systemic action learning infrastructure in response to local community dynamics	• Ensures safe spaces for authentic inclusion of diverse perspectives • Engages diverse stakeholders in learning and action processes
	Infrastructure Assessment	Assessment tool for determining if an existing infrastructure provides conditions for inclusive, collective action	• Supports development of inclusive infrastructure that supports collective action
	Weaving Cheat Sheet	Facilitation tool for identifying opportunities for weaving critical information across action teams	• Integrates knowledge and action synergy across action teams

[2] See http://systemexchange.org/application/files/8315/4265/7741/ABLe_ExampleSharedVisioning_11-19-18.pdf

[3] See http://systemexchange.org/application/files/2615/3184/1197/ABLe_IdentifyingRelevantPerspectives_f.pdf

TABLE 1 (continued)

Critical Process No. 3: Create Collaborative Meeting Processes That Emphasize Action Over Information Sharing			
Process Activity	**Tool**	**Description**	**Value for Promoting Action**
Design agendas for action.	Shared Agenda Template	Template for creating a shared agenda around prioritized systems-change goals	• Organizes meetings around taking action towards systems-change goals • Promotes aligned actions
Support action between meetings.	Quick Wins Coaching Tool	Facilitator prompts to support quick-win actions between meetings	• Reduces resistance to change • Supports movement on actions
	Example Coaching Schedule	Process for providing support to stakeholders initiating quick-win actions between regular meetings	• Reduces barriers to action encountered by stakeholders • Promotes effective implementation and action success
Create culture of accountability.	Action Record Template[4]	Template to document initiated and completed quick-win actions related to prioritized goals, including outcomes	• Builds culture of accountability
	Run Chart Database	Database to automatically generate run charts summarizing initiated and completed quick-win activities	• Builds culture of accountability
Critical Process No. 4: Emphasize Quick Wins to Galvanize Meaningful Actions, Build Momentum, and Expand Capacity for Change			
Process Activity	**Tool**	**Description**	**Value for Promoting Action**
Launch 100-day challenges.	100-Day Challenge Guide[5]	Guide for engaging groups in identifying and achieving an ambitious and concrete result within 100 days	• Promotes readiness for change and reduces resistance to change • Engages diverse stakeholders in promoting actions in support of shared goals • Builds culture of accountability • Quickly creates movement towards action and shared goals
Create culture for quick wins: • Identify quick-win opportunities • Empower all stakeholders as agents of change	Quick Win Facilitators' Cheat Sheet	Tip sheet for promoting quick-win actions during and after collaborative meetings	• Promotes readiness for change and reduces resistance to change • Engages diverse stakeholders in promoting actions in support of shared goals • Shifts meeting focus to problem-solving and action • Builds culture of accountability

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[4] See https://www.dropbox.com/s/tnbm7l763hv2ltt/able-Systems-Change-Action-Record-Template.pdf?dl=0

[5] See https://www.dropbox.com/s/t1zlm76f1jtnfuo/ABLe%20Change%20100%20Day%20Challenge%20Planning%20Guide.pdf?dl=0

Once a community has identified a prioritized goal and used data to understand outcome disparities, we engage diverse stakeholders in a system-scanning process to understand why targeted problems and inequities exist in their community.

generative vision can be a powerful mechanism for promoting inclusive change by reducing ambiguity around what to prioritize for action, and clarifying individual and collective roles for improving community systems.

Certainly, most community change efforts target a set of shared goals or prioritized problems; yet, broad goal or problem statements alone are often inadequate for mobilizing diverse stakeholders around transformative action. First, these statements can create uncertainty among stakeholders around how to bring about change, which in turn can delay action (Dearing, 2008). For example, a broad aim such as "increase children's readiness for school" raises several questions that need to be answered before stakeholders can determine effective actions: What does "ready for school" look like? In what ways are children not ready for school in our community? Which children are the least ready for school, and why? When these questions remain unanswered, stakeholders often stall action due to uncertainty or take actions that unintentionally worsen local inequities because they are unable to tailor their efforts to address the needs of the most disadvantaged (LaChasseur, 2016).

Second, broad, vague goal or problem statements can increase the possibility of misaligned actions across settings (Dearing, 2008; Knott, Weissert, & Henry, 1999). In communities focused on increasing school readiness, for example, it is common for definitions of school readiness to vary across settings, such as preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Because this definition influences decisions such as curriculum selection, assessment procedures, and parent-engagement practices, pre-K programs can inadvertently take actions (e.g., adopting new curriculum) in solidarity with the broad school-readiness goal that are actually misaligned with the readiness needs of kindergarten classrooms.

To overcome these challenges, effective visions clearly define shared goals and prioritized problems, clarify the populations experiencing the greatest inequities, and reveal the multiple reasons why targeted problems and inequities are happening (Wolff, Minkler et al., 2017). When diverse stakeholders are engaged in developing the vision, they discover their own role and value within the change effort (Wolff, Minkler et al.) — insights than can motivate aligned actions. When visioning processes increase critical consciousness about local conditions, stakeholders become committed to systems-change goals (Fear, Rosaen, Bawden, & Foster-Fishman, 2006). The following activities were designed to promote these insights while engaging diverse stakeholders in developing a shared vision for change.

Engage Stakeholders in System Scanning

Once a community has identified a prioritized goal and used data to understand outcome disparities, we engage diverse stakeholders in a system-scanning process to understand why targeted problems and inequities exist in their community. In contrast to more general needs-assessment processes, the system scan explicitly focuses on understanding deep system structures within organizations, neighborhoods, service delivery systems, and whole communities that explain how and why a place and its members behave as they do (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). This focus on system characteristics reflects the growing recognition that transformative change occurs only if and when the deep structures of a system are altered, as they determine the dynamics that create and maintain targeted social problems and inequities (e.g., Best, 2011; Lounsbury & Mitchell, 2009). The system scan focuses on six characteristics

identified as critical to system functioning (e.g., Coffman, 2007; Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007): mindsets, program components, connections, regulations, resources, and power. By making the system the focus of inquiry, the system scan engages diverse stakeholders in a critical analysis of the local community, helping to move the conversation away from victim blaming to a recognition that the community system propagates and maintains poor outcomes. A variety of methods can be used to gather system-scan data, including conversations, surveys, and large group processes.[6]

The system-scan data is incorporated into the larger visioning effort and processes are used to ensure diverse perspectives are valued as a way to address common power and privilege imbalances (LaChasseur, 2016). For example, diverse stakeholders can be organized into affinity groups representing individuals from the same system role (e.g., leader, staff, consumer) to promote safe spaces for dialogue and the inclusion of diverse perspectives (Burns, 2007). If certain stakeholders — particularly those experiencing the greatest inequities — are logistically unable to participate, facilitators can reduce resulting power imbalances by gathering their input in advance and centering the remaining vision work around their perspectives.

Michigan's Ingham Great Start Collaborative[7] is a case example. The county collaborative facilitated a system-scanning process that initially gathered input from hundreds of diverse families and providers throughout the county. These findings were then brought into the monthly collaborative meetings for additional scanning and sense making sessions; stakeholders not part of the collaborative were also invited to these meetings. Participants initially sat in affinity groups with others who shared the same role (e.g., family member, direct service provider, leader, funder) and sought to identify root causes by asking questions about each of the six system characteristics (e.g., "What local

> *[S]ystem-scan processes often start with gathering the perspectives of individuals experiencing inequities, and then use these perspectives to guide what questions to ask other stakeholders with greater power and privilege (e.g., organizational leaders and staff).*

policies and procedures are getting in the way of kids being ready for school?"). The system scan helped this collaborative foster action in several ways. First, the process helped the group quickly gather information from multiple perspectives on systemic root causes to guide strategy design and clarify the focus for subsequent actions; system-change priorities emerged from these conversations. Second, engaging a diverse set of stakeholders in the system-scan process, including stakeholders not yet involved in the collaborative, helped the collaborative expand the network of stakeholders aware of and concerned about the system conditions influencing early childhood outcomes. Immediately following these processes, new stakeholders joined the collaborative, increasing membership by almost 45 percent and improving overall participation in collaborative efforts. Third, the process improved stakeholders' ownership of shared goals; following the system scan, members who had never before been engaged in the work volunteered to lead actions and work groups.

While the system-scan process empowers all stakeholders to serve as "experts," it intentionally privileges the perspective of those

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[6] To view the tools, listed in Table 1, see the System Scan Design Guide at https://www.dropbox.com/s/klrdb4ajfom1vnb/GENERAL_able-System-Scan-Design-Guide-6-15-18.pdf?dl=0 and the ABLe Change System Scan Question Menu at https://www.dropbox.com/s/pxkaavphrini01p/Systems%20scan%20question%20menu%205-17-18.pdf?dl=0

[7] See https://inghamgreatstart.org.

experiencing targeted problems and inequities to help recenter efforts within the margins (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010), challenge existing assumptions and power dynamics (Beer, Finnstrom, & Schrader, 2016), and increase the engagement of these individuals in ongoing change efforts. For example, system-scan processes often start with gathering the perspectives of individuals experiencing inequities, and then use these perspectives to guide what questions to ask other stakeholders with greater power and privilege (e.g., organizational leaders and staff). Methods such as PhotoVoice[8] (Wang & Burris, 1997) can serve as a powerful scanning method to engage and privilege the perspectives of individuals experiencing targeted problems and inequities.

Engage Stakeholders in Sense-Making and Prioritizing

While many change efforts engage diverse stakeholders in gathering data on local problems, few also engage these stakeholders — particularly those experiencing inequities — in making sense of this information to inform action (Foster-Fishman, Law, Lichty, Aoun, 2010). Yet, sense-making is a critical activity for triggering critical consciousness and action, as it promotes further insights into community conditions influencing local problems and increases motivation to change these conditions (Fear et al., 2006). Engaging diverse stakeholders in the sense-making process not only can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the community system (Midgley, 2000), but it can also help to address power imbalances within collaborative spaces related to who has the privilege to frame local issues (LaChasseur, 2016).

Facilitators can use a variety of processes to promote collaborative sense-making. Processes that provide opportunities for stakeholders to reflect on patterns within their data and identify root causes to foster a deeper understanding of system

conditions and dynamics are more likely to promote critical consciousness and trigger action[9] (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). To leverage the motivation and concern triggered by these processes, facilitators can engage stakeholders in identifying root causes on which they can start to take action immediately. Stakeholders also prioritize system-scan themes to target for change and these priorities are integrated into the shared vision and shared agenda for action.[10]

A case example is Ready for School, Ready for Life, an early childhood system-building initiative in Guilford County, North Carolina, that aims to improve birth outcomes, ensure on track development starting at birth through preschool, and help all children be ready for school. Launched in 2014, initiative leaders adopted ABLe Change as one of the frameworks to enhance their inclusion of diverse perspectives and build a communitywide vision for early childhood systems building. As part of the system scan, community conversations were held with over 240 diverse families and hundreds of local professionals and leaders representing the range of health and community-service agencies. To ensure broad support for the initiatives, diverse stakeholders were engaged in making sense of these data and integrating the findings into a shared vision. Given the compelling story families of young children told of exclusion and the need for a more responsive system, a PhotoVoice project was launched to further capture their voices and engage them as change agents. To further engage the full community in adopting the vision and mobilizing for action, the initiative held an Early Childhood Summit in early 2015 where 450 community stakeholders learned about the importance of early childhood and had an opportunity to examine local data related to the vision and to volunteer for action in support this vision. A communitywide communications campaign designed to support the initiative's vision was also launched to build

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[8] For a guide to using the PhotoVoice tool, listed in Table 1, see https://www.dropbox.com/s/3zmom0dyqzg2zzh/able-pv-manual.pdf?dl=0

[9] For sample processes, see the ABLe Sense-Making Guide, listed in Table 1, at https://www.dropbox.com/s/z9c7zk4fs2mlbr0/GENERAL_ABLe%20Sense-Making%20Guide_6-15-18.pdf?dl=0

[10] To view the System Scan Prioritizing Worksheet, listed in Table 1, see https://www.dropbox.com/s/l246yr1rad54b5j/able-prioritizing-system-change-targets-0605182.pdf?dl=0

public will around early childhood. Four years later, this vision still drives the work and engagement of local stakeholders, including families, continues to expand.

Critical Process No. 2: Engage Numerous Diverse Actors as Agents of Change

Change initiatives often struggle with how to best design their community change infrastructures in ways that engage diverse stakeholders and effectively support action. Questions concerning who to invite to the table(s) and how to organize and structure stakeholders into effective groups pose quandaries for even the most seasoned network managers and backbone staff. And these questions are critical: The infrastructure design that emerges within a community can have a profound impact on whether or not critical actions emerge and the collaborative effort succeeds (ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018). Unfortunately, typical infrastructure models often create environments that unintentionally impede diverse stakeholder action. For example, many communities struggle to effectively engage residents (ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018) and, as a result, few incorporate significant numbers of residents in their infrastructures or engage them in action (Wolff, Minkler et al., 2017). In addition, in the traditional coalition model, the collaboration can involve too many members to meaningfully engage stakeholders in discussions that motivate action (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012). As a result, many coalitions create smaller, nested, hierarchical groups to accommodate more stakeholders, but these structures can quickly become encumbered in approval steps and regimented processes that can delay and even impede action (ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018). These structures also often reify existing power and privilege dynamics (Neal & Neal, 2010), with authority and governance decisions typically centralized within the executive or governance group containing the "community elite" (Ryan, 2008). As a result, other stakeholders can become disenfranchised from the collective effort as they find their agenda or engagement in decision-making suppressed by these processes

> *The infrastructure design that emerges within a community can have a profound impact on whether or not critical actions emerge and the collaborative effort succeeds.*

(LeChasseur, 2016). Together, these structural configurations inadvertently create spaces incongruent with the type of problem solving and action needed to tackle complex social issues.

Inclusive change efforts need nimble structures that empower diverse stakeholders to innovate and take actions around the shared vision while coordinating actions to leverage larger systems change (ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018). This is more likely to occur when infrastructures leverage the wisdom within the "crowd" (Surowiecki, 2004) by providing individuals with opportunities to connect, share, and problem solve around relevant information; the authority to act on these insights; supports to learn quickly about these actions and respond accordingly; and processes to quickly distribute this knowledge across the network (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). We have found two tools and processes useful in creating these conditions: redrawing system boundaries to expand who gets invited to the table (Midgley, 2000; Wolff, Minkler et al., 2017); and creating systemic action organizing structures to engage diverse stakeholders as actors of change (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012).

Draw System Boundaries to Include Diverse Perspectives

Complex social problems such as education, employment, homelessness, and health emerge from an array of interacting conditions that are impossible for any given stakeholder to fully see and understand (Ulrich & Reynolds, 2010). Successful efforts strategically redraw their system boundaries to intentionally include the

Systemic action learning infrastructures are powerful organizing mechanisms for engaging diverse stakeholders in community-based change efforts.

variety of perspectives needed to fully understand and address this complexity (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). Because most communities have histories of excluding critical perspectives (e.g., Wolff, Minkler et al., 2017), the act of redrawing current engagement boundaries can communicate value and legitimacy to previously silenced perspectives (Peirson, Boydell, Ferguson, & Ferris, 2011) and expand the array of stakeholders available as actors of change. System boundaries can be redrawn at any phase of a change effort. To support the boundary-expansion process, we provide communities with a simple heuristic to aid their identification of additional stakeholders and perspectives to include in their efforts:

- individuals directly experiencing the problem. Attention to the diversity within this group is essential, so we encourage communities to consider a variety of demographic, experience, and geography categories (and their intersectionality) and to recruit with attention to this diversity, ensuring inclusion of those who are experiencing the most inequities;

- direct service providers across sectors who are or should be engaged with individuals experiencing the problem. We have found the social determinant of health categories (Healthy People, 2020) an easy framework to guide identification of relevant providers because it encourages attention to the array of conditions causing community problems;

- neighborhood intermediaries who support those experiencing the problem (e.g.,

faith-based leaders, neighborhood organizations, advocacy groups); and

- leaders of local cross-sector institutions or organizations, funders, and elected officials. We intentionally include multiple leadership levels to ensure efforts engage actors representing vertical organizational layers.

Develop a Systemic Action Learning Infrastructure

Systemic action learning infrastructures are powerful organizing mechanisms for engaging diverse stakeholders in community-based change efforts. Individuals are convened into separate affinity groups — referred to as systemic action learning teams (Burns, 2007) — organized around similar roles (e.g., family members, providers, leaders, funders) or outcome and strategy areas. Affinity groups are intentionally designed to provide safe spaces for diverse stakeholders to solve problems, influence decisions, and initiate action with others sharing their unique perspective. For this reason, attention is paid to the local dynamics that can interfere with engaging diverse stakeholders in authentic dialogue and collective action, such as a history of poor relationships among local agencies, distrust and cynicism between individuals within these agencies, and failed or absent attempts to engage local youth and families.

A case example is a system-of-care initiative in Saginaw, Michigan (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012), that set out to create a new infrastructure to support a systemic action learning process. Initial assessments revealed several community dynamics influencing infrastructure design: youth and families had little experience participating in decision-making groups, key public agencies involved in the effort had a history of interorganizational conflict, and leadership and staff within these organizations had a great deal of mistrust. In response, the conveners made the following design decisions:

- Spaces were created strictly for residents to develop skills in voicing their concerns before joining other decision-making tables.

FIGURE 1 Sample Systemic Action Learning Infrastructure
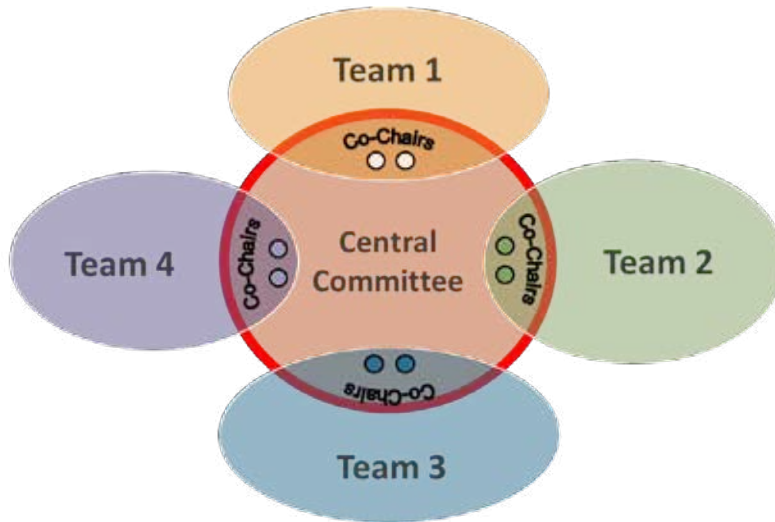
- No private-sector organizations were brought to the table at first, which gave the public organizations time to first improve their relationships.

- Staff and leaders were separated into their own affinity groups (e.g., cross-sector leaders with leaders, staff with staff) to promote space for honest dialogue.

Attention to these local dynamics created the context for success: Stakeholder engagement grew quickly as participants found the affinity group format empowering to their unique perspective. The authentic discussions and problem-solving sessions that emerged triggered more than 80 systems-change actions within the first six months; these actions led to significant systems improvements, including policies and procedures that increased access to mental health services and enhanced multisector service coordination.

Systemic action learning engages stakeholders in these "parallel and interacting" affinity groups to address shared goals (Burns, 2007). These teams use iterative, rapid action-learning processes to define and understand local problems, design strategies to address those problems, carry out actions, and learn for continuous improvement from their unique perspective. While each group works separately, backbone staff works to integrate knowledge and action between the groups by "weaving" critical information about emerging insights, questions, and action ideas across the teams and with relevant stakeholders outside the infrastructure. These rapid-feedback loops help to integrate diverse perspectives (Surowiecki, 2004) into other action teams while maintaining the confidentiality of specific individuals from each team.[11]

A change effort can also establish a central coordinating committee to engage team co-chairs in real-time weaving. (See Figure 1.) Overall, this infrastructure model also helps to legitimize typically undervalued stakeholders by helping the community understand, value, and use their resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, relationships) to promote collective action (Watson & Foster-Fishman, 2013).

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[11] For a tool to help identify opportunities for weaving, see the ABLe Change Weaving Cheat Sheet, discussed in Table 1, at https://www.dropbox.com/s/akpqlup581rj1am/Weaving%20Cheat%20Sheet.pdf?dl=0

A childhood obesity effort supported by the Down East Partnership for Children, in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, is a case example. Partnership staff assessed the boundaries of the community's health improvement efforts and recognized that most of those with obesity problems — low-income African American and Hispanic residents — were excluded from decision-making and action processes. They formed a resident action team, engaging them as agents of change and creating feedback loops between the residents' group and existing collaborative infrastructures and organizations. This resident group became a critical structure within the larger service system, recasting the role of residents from these low-income neighborhoods and institutionalizing the engagement of resident voices. Within just a few years, significant outcomes for participants, the partnership, and the community emerged. Participating residents demonstrated increased agency and expanded their leadership roles, independently initiating changes within the community. Several joined boards of local organizations and/or became employed as a result of their role in this group. Within the community, several local organizations shifted their policies and practices to better support local health as a result of the residents' actions — food policies shifted within the YMCA, for example — and more families increased their health literacy and connections to local resources such as SNAP and well-child pediatric visits.[12]

Critical Process 3: Emphasize Knowledge Generation and Action During Meetings

The facilitation and meeting processes of collaborative groups establish the climate for action within change initiatives (Carmell & Paulus, 2014). Opportunities for effective action are most likely to emerge when diverse stakeholders are inspired to make a difference, have opportunities to share and integrate their unique knowledge sets to understand problems and generate novel insights, and are encouraged to develop and carry out creative solutions (Baruah & Paulus, 2009). While many collaborative groups have developed sophisticated information-sharing practices (to keep each other updated on local programs, etc.), effective processes for promoting problem solving and action are less common. Baseline data from communities with which we partner often identify the meeting processes as a critical barrier to promoting action. Some community partners have even named this problem: "Sit 'n Gits," where diverse stakeholders meet, sit, get information, and leave. To help shift these habits, we have designed specific tools surrounding the meeting agenda, minutes, and implementation supports to encourage and nurture a climate supportive of action and continuous improvement within the action teams. (See Table 1.)

Design Agendas for Action

Agendas are widely recognized as a critical tool for having an effective meeting (Kruse, 2015) and for establishing the norms regarding meeting focus and priorities. We promote two agenda processes to encourage the focus on action and learning. First, we organize the agenda around prioritized systems-change goals to maintain the focus on changing the system and to facilitate coordinated action. Each systemic action learning team has an agenda organized around these priorities, though the work for each group is varied given their roles, interests, and spheres of influence. Second, because effective community change processes encourage continuous improvement (e.g., Porter, Martin, & Anda, 2016), we language the agenda items around problem-solving and action questions to create a culture of inquiry around all phases of the work. For example, if a prioritized goal is "promoting service coordination," we include questions to identify and understand areas of excellence ("What is an example of coordination working this past month?" "What did that look like?" "Why was it successful?" "Where

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[12] For more details, see the ABLe Change Guide to Designing a Systemic Action Learning Infrastructure and Infrastructure Assessment, listed in Table 1, at https://www.dropbox.com/s/jmw96todpevlocq/Guide%20to%20designing%20an%20ABLe-infrastructure-060115.pdf?dl=0 and https://www.dropbox.com/s/9fpy7ij3i3ex40w/Assessment%20of%20Your%20Efforts%20Infrastructure.pdf?dl=0

else might this work?") and current challenges ("What is an example of coordination not working this past month?" "What did that look like?" "Why did it break down?" "What else might we need to understand?" "What can be done about this?"). Both areas of inquiry help to cultivate a climate where stakeholders generate new knowledge about the targeted problem that can be integrated into novel solutions (Kohn, Paulus, & Choi, 2011). As the discussion proceeds, an action orientation is supported through questions such as: What does this suggest an important next step might be? What else do we need to understand before we act? This culture of inquiry can also promote rapid feedback about implementation efforts and encourage continuous learning and improvement efforts[13] (Patton, 2011).

The power of adopting an action orientation with collaborative meetings is well illustrated in the case example of the transformation experienced by Smart Start Norman, an early childhood collaborative. The collaborative had been meeting for over 10 years, with recent meetings focused mostly on information sharing, such as organizational updates. Meetings were poorly attended (fewer than 10 people a month) and little action was generated. The collaborative's coordinator decided to launch a system scan to elicit conditions that impeded early childhood success. Her hope was that an authentic conversation about the early childhood system would re-energize members, and it did; within a few months monthly meeting attendance increased to more than 20 people. She then developed a shared agenda based on the group's system-scan priorities and reorganized the meetings to focus on designing strategies to address these priorities.

In this revamped process, members were now highly engaged and interested in taking action because the meetings were focused on addressing issues members themselves had learned about and prioritized through the scan. One priority, for example, was the low level of well-child visits to pediatricians and immunizations

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after age 5. After learning more details about the root causes of the problem, the group launched a series of actions to create a context that encouraged these healthy behaviors. Teachers and Oklahoma Department of Human Services workers received protocols to talk with parents about well-child visits and immunizations. Health clinics revised their processes to automatically remind families to schedule their next visit. The group also helped schools to add questions to their annual enrollment forms asking about the last well-child visit and to follow up with families showing lapses. These systems changes helped create the contextual coherence needed to reinforce families' increased engagement in well-child visits and immunizations.

Support Effective Implementation Between Meetings

Stakeholders who volunteer to initiate action often need support behind the scenes; they often experience barriers to carrying out actions or simply fail to act (Fixsen et al., 2005). Providing support between meetings can promote more effective implementation and help ensure continued momentum (Powell et al., 2015). This support is particularly important to ensure all stakeholders — regardless of initial skills, resources, and social connections — have equitable power and opportunities to take action as part of the change efforts.

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[13] For sample questions to promote learning and action, see the ABLe Change Quick Wins Guide, listed in Table 1, at https://www.dropbox.com/s/jjob90nl3zxtaf1/5.%20ABLe%20Change%20Quick%20Wins%20Guide_5-28-18.pdf?dl=0

One way to support action between meetings is to develop actionable meeting minutes that summarize in detail the group's discussion and all action items. A second approach involves contacting those members tasked with action items to ensure they can carry them out effectively.

One way to support action between meetings is to develop actionable meeting minutes that summarize in detail the group's discussion and all action items.[14] A second approach involves contacting those members tasked with action items to ensure they can carry them out effectively.[15] Stakeholders are more likely to carry out actions when they believe they have the capacities to implement them well (Honig, 2003); providing technical assistance to support and build these capacities has been shown to increase the effectiveness of local change efforts (Spoth & Greenberg, 2011). The best method (e.g., phone, email) for this behind-the-scenes coaching and technical assistance will depend on local community dynamics. Regardless of the method, it is essential to identify someone who can provide this coaching: It ensures members will come to each meeting ready to celebrate their progress and foster the group's momentum. When staffing support is limited, group members can alternate these support roles.

Create a Culture of Mutual Accountability

Large stakeholder networks often experience "social loafing" (Karau & Williams, 1993), with partners assuming someone else will take necessary actions. Creating a culture of mutual accountability, where each individual is viewed as a critical actor of change who shares responsibility for taking actions, is a critical prelude to large-scale systems change (e.g., Hargreaves et al., 2017). To support this approach, we encourage groups to create and use "action records" that document initiated and completed actions and resulting outcomes.

Excel run charts are excellent visual summaries of action records that can help stakeholders review and celebrate progress, compare actions across change goals, and identify gaps in action. For example, backbone staff can create individualized run charts for each organization or team to illustrate their initiated actions compared to a de-identified summary of actions initiated by others; these summaries help organizational leaders track, and if necessary adjust, their own progress and efforts in the collective work, boosting mutual accountability.[16]

In the case example of another system-of-care initiative, a key partner agency was not engaged in action at the level needed. To address this issue, a customized visual run chart was developed and shown to every agency leader so they could consider their own organization's activity level in relationship to the actions of others within the community. Leaders were asked to consider such questions as, "What does this chart tell you about the actions within this community and within your own organization?" "Moving forward, what would you like your action chart to look like?" "What supports could help you achieve this goal?" Leaders were also invited to have a private coaching call to further discuss these questions. This approach

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[14] For a sample format for meeting minutes, see the Shared Agenda template, listed in Table 1, at https://www.dropbox.com/s/ltxq4oqmexm4o2v/ABLe_Shared%20Agenda%20template_3-16-18.pdf?dl=0

[15] As listed in Table 1, see the Quick Wins coaching tool at https://www.dropbox.com/s/03ruhhc8nuvzlf7/Quick%20Wins%20Coaching%20Tool_5-28-18.pdf?dl=0 and a sample coaching schedule at https://www.dropbox.com/s/cepfjnqyj94vtkg/Example%20coaching%20schedule.pdf?dl=0

[16] To access the run chart database tool listed in Table 1, see https://www.dropbox.com/s/7w7bajcmbkz7yv6/Sample%20Quick%20Win%20Tracking%20Database%205.1.18%20template.xlsm?dl=0

effectively re-engaged this agency; the leader, unaware of the lack of action within his agency, committed to increasing activity levels and within the year the agency's related actions increased more than tenfold.

Critical Process No. 4: Emphasize Quick Wins

Sometimes the very notion of taking on "yet another thing" is overwhelming for even the most committed stakeholders. For this reason, we adopted a focus on promoting quick wins — changes that are small enough to seem plausible but significant enough to matter given the purpose of the change effort (Weick, 1984). A typical quick win takes less than three months to accomplish and engenders little resistance because it tackles desirable improvements within the system that lay the foundation for larger system, policy, and practice changes (ORS Impact & Spark Institute, 2018). Because quick wins demonstrate the possibility of change within a short period of time, they exponentially grow capacity for change (Foster-Fishman, Fitzgerald, Brandell, Nowell, Chavis, & Van Egeren, 2006; Schaffer & Ashkenas, 2005); each change instigates more action and motivates more system members to pursue change, accelerating progress towards larger goals through their cumulative impact (Anderson, 1999; Weick, 1984). We focus on quick wins throughout all stages of our community change work. The following are the two most effective techniques we have used to promote them:

Launch 100-Day Challenges

Hundred-day challenges are collaborative projects designed to accomplish a specific goal, and tackle system improvements such as revised intake processes to reduce delays and pilot projects to address service-system gaps. Based upon the work of the Rapid Results Institute (Matta & Morgan, 2011; Schaffer & Ashkenas, 2005), 100-day challenges are intended to shift how participants think about the pace and possibility of change and about who can serve as a change agent within a community. It is not uncommon for communities and funders to believe that "change will take time." This mindset can be a

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significant impediment to change, since work tends to fill the time available (Parkinson, 1957): If stakeholders believe that change should take years to accomplish, they are likely to design their processes and strategic plans in ways that support this temporal belief. These challenges aspire to create a new temporal synchronicity (Ryan, 2008) around the pace of change by creating the explicit expectation that significant results can occur within 100 days, which can be particularly powerful given that many communities become stuck or lose momentum in extended planning processes (Miller & Burns, 2006).

In addition to creating new norms around the pace and feasibility of change, 100-day challenges also serve as incubators for new habits and practices within a community. As alternative, temporary settings (Moos, 2003), they can provide a safe space for innovation and for "threading reform ideas" (Coburn, 2003, pg. 7). For example, we incorporate into our challenges the design-thinking practice of developing "empathy" for targeted populations (IDEO, 2015), where all challenge teams are expected to engage local residents to understand their lived experience and design in response to this insight. We also incorporate a rapid-cycle improvement process (Schaffer & Ashkenas, 2005) to enhance local problem-solving and learning capacities, which further expands readiness for

A quick-win focus can be emphasized in all stages in the life cycle of a project or change initiative by integrating the quick-wins lens into conversations and action-team meetings.

change (Cunningham et al., 2002). Finally, local implementation capability is enhanced as large numbers of stakeholders, including local residents, direct care providers, and organizational and community leaders, are simultaneously engaged in system improvements (Schaffer & Ashkenas).

In a case example, 100-day challenges were launched as part of the North Carolina early childhood initiative to spark immediate action and debunk the belief that "change never happens here." These challenge teams were launched at the Early Childhood Summit, where stakeholders examined the new shared vision for change and suggested challenge ideas to spark action towards shared goals. Twelve challenge teams, engaging 146 parents and community stakeholders representing 44 agencies and organizations, tackled such issues as improving transition from pre-K to kindergarten, increasing access to culturally relevant literacy programs, and building a breastfeeding-friendly community; one team that included families focused on engaging families as change agents. Teams were trained in action-learning processes and received regular coaching to support their implementation. A post-challenge celebration was held to allow teams to share their successes and identify next steps in the work. In addition to launching the shared vision, the challenge fostered several mindsets and new habits for working that persist today: Stakeholders have integrated the

process of gathering family input as an integral part of design and continuous improvement, the belief that change is possible has become more prevalent, and stakeholders seek quick wins and actions in their current work. Stakeholder engagement in efforts to build early childhood systems expanded significantly through these challenges, and many of the early childhood strategic objectives pursued today were launched during those challenges.

Create a Culture for Quick Wins

A quick-win focus can be emphasized in all stages in the life cycle of a project or change initiative by integrating the quick-wins lens into conversations and action-team meetings. For example, meeting facilitators prime stakeholders for action when they ask questions that seek to understand (e.g., "What else do we need to learn before we can move to action?") and resolve local problems (e.g., "What can we do to address this barrier?" "What next steps could be taken to move this work forward?"). When they ask questions that situate action within the group and leverage opportunities and interests (e.g., "What quick win actions can you take in the next month to help solve this issue?"), they develop concrete action items.[17]

Empower All Stakeholders as Agents of Change

It is not uncommon for stakeholders who are not leaders (e.g., low-income families, direct-line staff) within a community system to feel powerless in their roles. Because transformative change requires action across diverse settings and layers (Schaffer & Ashkenas, 2005), creating the conditions for stakeholders to locate their agency or power within the system and take actions leveraging that power base is essential (Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014).

For example, facilitators can ask questions during action-learning meetings to help individuals creatively identify feasible actions they can implement within their scope of influence (e.g., "What do you have the power in this situation

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[17] For sample quick wins, see the ABLe Change Quick Wins Guide, listed in Table 1, at https://www.dropbox.com/s/jjob90nl3zxtaf1/5.%20ABLe%20Change%20Quick%20Wins%20Guide_5-28-18.pdf?dl=0

to influence to change?" "What does the system need from you and your peers in order for this to work?"). To build the value of all stakeholders as agents of change, action teams are asked about potential activities others could implement to support their efforts. Questions concerning these action opportunities are then integrated into upcoming meeting agenda.[18]

Successes and Limitations of the Framework and Tools

Communities are easier to mobilize around an action focus when critical capacities are in place. Others have highlighted the importance of backbone staff in collaborative efforts (Kania & Kramer, 2011), and we, too, have found that either paid staff or consultants with strong interpersonal, organizational, and action-learning facilitation skills are needed to effectively support the movement towards action and learning. In general, we have found that for a robust set of effective actions to emerge, about 10 to 15 hours per week of staff time for every three to four affinity teams is needed to support the practices described in this article; more time is needed if the practices run significantly counter to the status quo.

This focus on action is also more likely to succeed when local organizations or communities are not in a crisis/survivor mode. When organizations face insurmountable caseloads and administrative tasks, organizations are less likely to actively engage in collaborative efforts (Hoey & Sponseller, 2018). Finally, the support and active engagement of top organizational leaders is essential in work that aims to transform the status quo. Actions pursued by other stakeholders become stalled and key policy and procedure changes remain elusive if key leaders are not engaged as agents of change.

The Role of Foundations

As institutional theory (Scott & Meyer, 1994) reminds us, organizations adjust their behavior to align with the norms and expectations of

This suggests that if foundations wish to support the creation of an inclusive change culture, they could consider modeling and promoting norms and practices that foster inclusion and a movement to effective systems-change actions.

their environment, particularly those of their funders. For these reasons, funder expectations can significantly influence the shape and success of community change efforts (Chaidez-Gutierrez & Fischer, 2013). This suggests that if foundations wish to support the creation of an inclusive change culture, they could consider modeling and promoting norms and practices that foster inclusion and a movement to effective systems-change actions. Specifically:

- Foundations should continue to work to recast the roles of the less powerful within communities, including establishing explicit expectations around the active engagement of disenfranchised populations. This engagement needs to include more than providing input or having only a few residents sitting on governance bodies; youth, adults, and families living with the targeted problems should be actively engaged in designing the vision, establishing the agenda, and participating in all stages of implementation, decision making, and learning. Because this practice continues to be relatively new for many communities, foundations can play an important role in establishing norms that value such engagement and investing in building the capacity of residents to engage in these ways. This

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[18] For sample facilitation questions to support this process, see the Quick Win Facilitators' Cheat Sheet, listed in Table 1, at https://www.dropbox.com/s/rbfkw9sfmzdpl1j/Quick%20Win%20Faciliators%20Cheat%20Sheet.pdf?dl=0

includes holding local decision-makers accountable to resident feedback.

- Contracting, monitoring, and reporting processes provide significant opportunities to further support norms for inclusive, transformative change. Adaptive contracting that encourages course corrections can create more transparency about the challenges inherent in this work and enhance the likelihood that grantees will adjust in response to community needs (Porter, Martin, & Anda, 2016). An inclusive change-making agenda (Brown, 2012) could be enhanced if systemic action and learning processes become integrated into contracts, monitoring, and reports. And, of course, reducing the frequency and length of reports will better align these requirements with grantee resources and change-effort needs.

- Foundations can help to debunk the myth that change takes time by intentionally promoting readiness for change (Easterling & Millsen, 2015). Shifts in local policies and practices can actually happen quickly, but only when communities believe that change is possible, systems change becomes the focus of the work, and change initiatives support quick action across diverse stakeholders (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012). Resources, through minigrants and supports to promote quick cross-sector action and learning, could further help to debunk this myth and create a culture for change.

- Foundations can work with other local funders to create aligned outcome and reporting frameworks to build synergy and reduce reporting burdens. These frameworks should include short and intermediate outcomes that emphasize systems change, effective implementation, and adaptive learning, as these create the foundation for inclusive transformative change.

- Foundations can invest in what Morgan (2015) calls "general community capacity". This includes the ability to build honest

relationships across diverse stakeholders, engage in difficult conversations, share power and decision-making authority, address local inequities and structural racism, and pursue collective action. As many communities face the aging out of local leaders, investments in building such capacity are particularly important to ensure the next generation of leaders are equipped to promote transformative change.

Finally, foundations, just like other stakeholders within a system, need to recognize their power and influence and instigate change within that sphere of influence. Many community change efforts would benefit from foundations leveraging their networks and influence to shift community norms and mindsets and to align business and government policies with change goals (Brown, 2012).

And, of course, collaborative efforts that promote inclusive change would not succeed if some level of backbone staff did not exist. While many foundations invest in launching backbone organizations or supporting such efforts for a limited time, it is less common to find sustained funding for backbone functions. The disinvestment in these infrastructures reduces collaborative capacity and significantly stalls community change efforts as they work to restructure themselves to accommodate the loss of this support. Foundations have a significant opportunity to support transformative change by providing matching funds to encourage local and state governments to sustain these roles.

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Tools

Thriving Communities: A Model for Community-Engaged Grantmaking

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Introduction

Interact for Health is a regional health conversion foundation serving 20 counties in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana. Thriving Communities, its current initiative, is a community-learning model that helps embed health promotion and advocacy work in communities while they build an equitable infrastructure with stakeholders to more rapidly spread evidence-based practices.

There are 10 Thriving Communities in Interact's service area. (See Figure 1.) Grantees, which include rural, urban, and cultural communities, are eligible for up to $50,000 over five years. With five years invested in this work, Interact found that these small, flexible general-operating grants are succeeding in developing infrastructure to continue health promotion after Interact's funding ends. In addition to funding, Interact also provides training, tools and structured quarterly in-person Learning Collaboratives during which grantees network and share best practices.

Three tools were developed for the Thriving Communities initiative: Success Markers, the Developmental Pathway, and Relationship Mapping. Interact has found that these tools build core competencies, confidence, and a process for engagement that produces results at the local level.

Background

Interact for Health's mission is to improve health by promoting health equity in the Greater Cincinnati region through community engagement, grants, research, education, and policy. It began its work by looking at community health

Key Points

- Interact for Health is a health conversion foundation serving the three-state region of Greater Cincinnati, Ohio. Its current community change initiative, Thriving Communities, is a community-learning model that helps embed health promotion and advocacy work in communities while those communities build an equitable infrastructure with stakeholders to more rapidly spread evidence-based practices.

- This article explores the three tools developed for the Thriving Communities initiative: Success Markers, the Developmental Pathway, and Relationship Mapping. Interact for Health has found that these tools build core competencies and confidence among grantees as well as a process for community engagement that produces results at the local level.

- Thriving Communities grantees are eligible for up to $50,000 in funding over five years. In addition to the general operating grants, Interact provides training, tools, and structured-learning collaboratives where grantees can network and share best practices. With five years invested in this work, Interact has found that these small, flexible grants are succeeding in developing infrastructure to continue health promotion after funding from the foundation ends.

needs and identifying prevention as an area of grantmaking. Community-led initiatives started in 2000 with the Assistance for Substance Abuse Prevention (ASAP) Center, an operating program

FIGURE 1 Thriving Communities in Interact for Health's Service Area
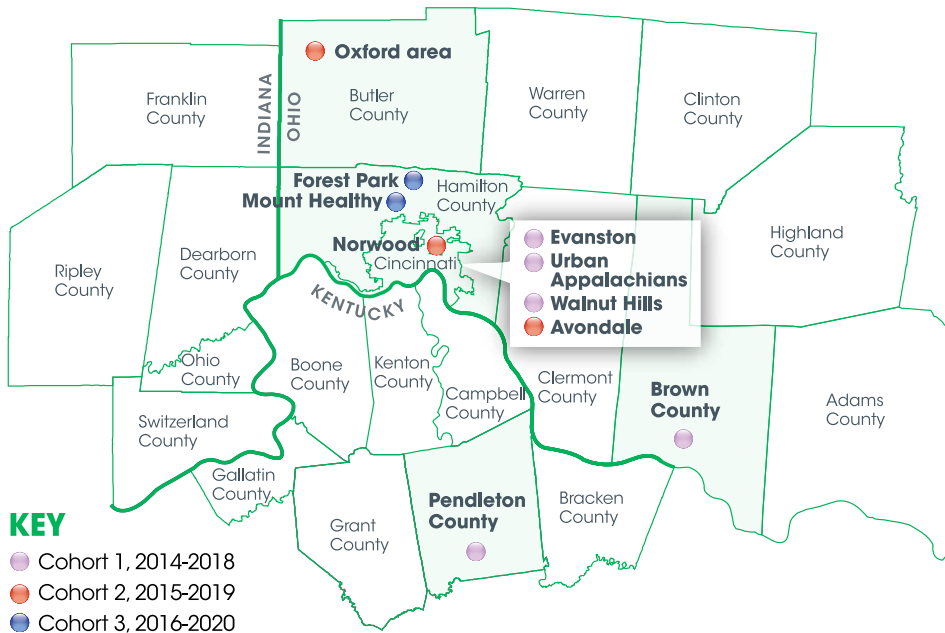
that provided one-year minigrants of $500 to $5,000 to nonprofits with strong community links. By working collaboratively with traditional sources of prevention — coalitions, prevention providers, resource centers, and other organizations — the ASAP Center helped community groups incorporate substance abuse prevention methods into everyday activities. While this work was viewed as organic, it was also intentional and created incremental but important change within communities and among systems that engaged with the center.

The ASAP Center also provided technical assistance, such as educational workshops, coaching, and connections to resources, that allowed partners to build organizational capacity as they implemented proven prevention approaches in their communities. Support was tailored to meet the unique needs of organizations and communities, with particular attention to developing prevention and early-intervention activities that

reached the faith community, the Hispanic community, rural communities, and older adults.

Many of these entities formed or were associated with substance abuse prevention coalitions. In general, federal and state funding and technical support to such coalitions come with specific requirements for community-led projects that meet certain funder needs. Encouraging active connection between ASAP minigrantees and a substance abuse prevention coalition increased the likelihood that the effort would be sustained and that common outcomes could be tracked across communities. However, those funding requirements also can make it difficult to enter into substance-use prevention work, especially for small, grassroots organizations. Interact for Health chose to support communities regardless of whether they qualified for federal and state funding, and to help align substance abuse prevention work with evidence-based practices. Grantees were connected to resources such as the federal Youth.gov website[1] and University

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[1] See www.youth.gov.

Grantees said they needed more specific tools to guide their progress, identify each aspect of the work needed to produce results, and improve their intentionality. They also requested more evaluation support so they would be ready to apply for other, larger sources of funding.

of Colorado-based Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development,[2] which identify core prevention components and programs for various populations and settings that have been proven to work. Interact provided more flexible funding, but recognized that its level of funding did not allow for rigorous evaluation of projects; the goal was that grantees adopt proven approaches.

After 10 years of grantmaking by the ASAP Center, Interact for Health saw that some of the grantees incorporated regular community engagement processes that increased community ownership of solutions. The community tested ideas, got support to sustain projects, and returned to Interact for additional minigrants. The foundation conducted focus groups with grantees who demonstrated a willingness to work hard to make change happen. Interact wanted to learn what it did as a funder that was helpful or that created barriers for grantees. Grantees said they needed more specific tools to guide their progress, identify each aspect of the work needed to produce results, and improve their intentionality. They also requested more evaluation support so they would be ready to apply for other, larger sources of funding. Interact

still follows this model and used this input to develop its Thriving Communities initiative.

The Thriving Communities Model

In 2013, Interact for Health decided to add healthy eating, active living, and mental and emotional well-being to its substance abuse prevention work, all with a concentration on health promotion. It replaced the ASAP Center with the Thriving Communities model, increasing funding to fewer communities and providing that funding over a five-year period rather than annually. Interact selected 10 grantee communities — three rural, two suburban, four urban, and the Urban Appalachians cultural community — and grouped them into three cohorts. (See Figure 2.) Cohort 1 started in 2014 with five grantee groups; three grantee communities — Cohort 2 — were added in 2015; and two more were added in 2016 to make up Cohort 3.

The grantees were selected through a public, competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process, in which potential grantee communities submitted letters of intent that were assessed by an external review committee.[3] The applicants' readiness to participate in community-led health promotion was reviewed and if specific criteria were demonstrated, the prospective grantees were invited to submit a full proposal (typically five to eight pages).

The committee recommended inviting full proposals only from well-established community groups led by people with roots in the affected communities. Thriving Communities is rooted in the strong belief that grantees need to be representative of community residents and seen as community leaders. In the full proposal, a potential grantee is required to demonstrate that at least five community leaders have agreed to collaborate and that those leaders have experience working together to solve community issues. Such leaders seen as able to initiate and activate change have included city council members, community organizers, college professors,

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[2] See www.blueprintsprograms.org.

[3] The external review committee included representatives from Interact and several members of the Cincinnati community familiar with place-based funding, as well as experts in community engagement and health promotion.

FIGURE 2 Thriving Communities Cohorts, 2014–2020
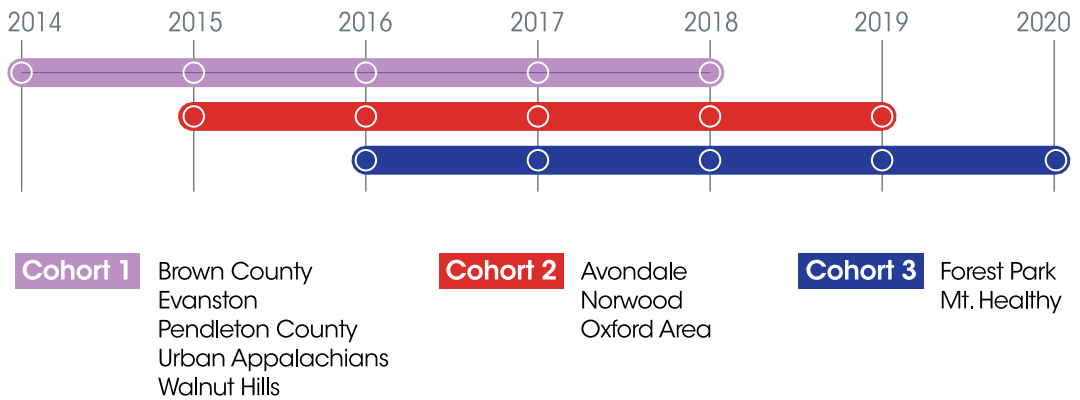
school superintendents, fire chiefs, pastors, promising local youth, coordinators of social service agencies, university extension officers, and influential community residents who are unaffiliated with any organization but display a passion for changing neighborhood conditions. No prior focus on health was required.

Thriving Communities grantees are eligible for up to $50,000 of general operating support over five years – a $15,000 grant in year one and up to $7,500 in challenge grants in years two through five. Up to $5,000 in pay-for-performance incentives are built in to increase participation and build shared leadership. To obtain the year-one grant, grantees have up to four months to submit an action plan that details how the grant will be used in the next calendar year. (See Appendix.) If grantees meet the regular Thriving Communities reporting deadlines and challenge-grant matches (most have in most years) and identify time-sensitive projects that arise, they can apply to Interact for additional funding. These responsive grants, of $5,000 to $25,000, must align with the grantee's existing action plan; such flexibility allows grantees to

leverage resources when new opportunities arise to increase their reach or intensify their efforts.[4] In most years, three to four responsive grants are awarded among the 10 grantees. Five years into this 10-year initiative, Interact has found that these small, flexible general operating grants are succeeding in developing infrastructure to continue health promotion after the foundation's funding ends.

In addition to funding, Interact for Health provides technical assistance, tools, and in-person learning-collaborative meetings, which are structured, four-hour quarterly gatherings that support grantee learning. The content of each meeting varies and can include general nonprofit education and skills development. Attendees also present a written and oral report, share best practices and lessons learned, and network with their peers. Additionally, grantees participate in on-site coaching, workshops, and annual site visits for the duration of the grant. During that time, the grantees adopt evidence-based practices, carry out activities, and develop community infrastructure to sustain community-led health promotion.

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[4] Examples of responsive grants include funding to Brown County for a Poverty Simulation Kit, allowing the grantee to host trainings for adults from several systems to experience a day in the life of a public assistance recipient. Avondale used a grant to leverage an opportunity to build an elementary school track that is available for use by neighborhood residents year-round.

Successful Thriving Communities grantees:

- Build coalitions that are capable of taking on multiple health initiatives;

- Expand their ability to plan and execute health-promotion activities;

- Improve community engagement; and

- Sustain their health promotion projects.

The Thriving Communities staff includes a full-time senior program officer who leads the initiative, a dedicated portion of time from an internal evaluation officer, administrative support, and access to communications staff members as needed. For additional technical assistance, Interact also provides grantees with access to consultants who specialize in communications, evaluation, fundraising, and sustainability.

Thriving Communities Tools

Measuring community change can be complex and difficult. In developing the Thriving Communities initiative, Interact for Health staff and consultants reviewed existing literature and consulted with experts in the field to design three tools to measure and promote the growth and development of the grantee communities — tools can be easily transferred to other projects in other sectors:

- Success Markers – key infrastructure, programming, and sustainability capacities that grantees must cultivate for effective community health promotion;

- The Developmental Pathway – a way to understand a Thriving Community's progress from emerging to expanding to sustaining practices; and

- Relationship Mapping – a collaborative, hands-on approach to assess and build the network of stakeholders with the right type and depth of relationships in the grantee's community.

Success Markers

The literature review and Interact's own historical experience made clear that there are critical ingredients to successful health promotion (Bandeh, Kaye, Wolff, Trasolini, & Cassidy, 1995; Barnes & Schmitz, 2016; Best et al., 2003; Brennan, Ramirez, Baker, & Metzler, 2008; Chaskin, 1999; Chehimi & Cohen, 2013; National Prevention Council, 2011; Davis, Rivera, & Fujie Parks, 2015; Active Living by Design, n.d.; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Lee, 2014; LeRoy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1998; Mansuri & Rao, 2003; Healthy People 2020, 2018). The Thriving Communities Success Markers help grantees develop seven key dimensions or capacities identified as being essential to executing community-led health promotion efforts. These include an emphasis on the empowerment and participation of community members in addressing health issues, the use of a range of strategies, and a concern with equity. The markers also reflect a shift from the traditional focus on individuals to one that encompasses social and environmental influences (Merzel & D'Afflitti, 2003). The Success Markers provide a way for communities to give adequate attention to both process- and outcome-oriented steps and to adopt a common language for planning and measuring progress.

The Success Markers are divided into three categories: infrastructure, implementation, and sustainability. (See Table 1.) The Success Markers for infrastructure are foundational and represent the importance of engaging community members throughout the process, development of a shared vision, and the type of leadership needed to steer community efforts. The Success Markers for implementation focus on the need for a variety of community-based health promotion strategies, including programs and policy, systems, and environmental change. The Success Markers for sustainability emphasize the importance of fundraising and friend-raising.[5] Grantees report progress on the Success Markers annually.

The Developmental Pathway

The Developmental Pathway is designed to assess a community's progress each year on each

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[5] Friend-raising refers to the process of growing a larger network of allies.

TABLE 1 Interact for Health's Thriving Communities Initiative Success Markers

Success Marker Category	Success Marker
Infrastructure	People see that everyone has a role to play in health promotion.[6]
	People are engaged in a shared vision for health promotion.[7]
	Health promotion efforts are coordinated.[8]
Implementation	People understand and are using evidence-based practices.[9]
	Health promotion efforts focus on a variety of approaches.[10]
	Health promotion efforts are data-informed.[11]
Sustainability	Health promotion efforts are sustained.[12]

of the seven Success Markers. The tool helps grantees manage changes in goals and available resources that occur over time. Communities are able to track their progress in developing clearer visions and expanding networks, and on shared leadership. These critical components, when addressed, increase the capacity of groups to effectively recruit partners who will expand their ability to carry out the projects.

Communities initially used a color-based scale to assess their progress: If a community rated itself as "red" on a given success marker, the community had not yet taken action on the marker; yellow indicated that action was in progress; and green indicated that a marker had been achieved. But communities found the three-color system to be inadequate. Some communities thought it was punitive to report themselves as red in

any category but did not want to report more progress than they had achieved, and decided to use colors such as orange or lime to represent stages between the three original categories. Too much time was being spent struggling to accurately report progress, and the color system was abandoned.

The redesigned Developmental Pathway describes three phases of change that communities use to examine their work on each Success Marker. The "emerging," "expanding," and "sustaining" phases characterize the approaches needed over time to initiate and sustain community-level change. In the emerging phase, grantees are developing a plan for health promotion and identifying the right resources or participants to engage in the planning process; limited activities may be occurring. In the

[6] Fredericks & Carman, 2013; Gopal & Clarke, 2015; Mind Tools, n.d.; Taylor et al., 2015; Schiffer, 2007

[7] Prevention Institute, 2016; Mattessich, Murray-Close, Marta, & Monse, 2001; Pankaj, Athanasiades, Kat, & Emery, 2014; Healthy People 2020, 2010a?b?

[8] Community Tool Box, 2018a; Fisher et al., 2006; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Healthy People 2020, 2010a?b?

[9] National Prevention Council, 2011

[10] Brennan, Ramirez, Baker, & Metzler, 2008

[11] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013; Community Tool Box, 2018b; Fisher, et Al, 2006; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Sharma, Lanum, & Suarez-Balcazar, 2000; Shea, Jones-Santos, Byrnes, 2012

[12] (Active Living by Design, 2016)

To assist communities in assessing and planning for collaboration, the Interact team facilitated a Relationship Mapping process with each grantee.

expanding phase, proper resources and participants have been identified and engaged, and evidence-based activities are being undertaken. During this phase, the foundation's program officer provides coaching to help grantees connect with allies and select evidence-based practices that will help them reach their goals and allow their work to be sustained. This coaching may include bringing together grantees and expert consultants at learning collaboratives, directing grantees to resources, or sharing program officers' own experience with various practices. In the sustaining phase, grantees have experienced success in their health-promotion efforts and work on ways to maintain that success.

On the annual report form, grantees are provided with examples of what each phase means for each Success Marker. (See Appendix.) For the "People see everyone has a role to play in health promotion" marker, for example, a community that has a "narrow/limited group not fully representative of the community demographic" is in the emerging phase; a community that has "health-promotion efforts that are community led" is in the sustaining phase. These examples help grantees assess the phase their work is in, write about their achievements, and indicate the next steps to continue progress. The goal is for communities to move through the phases of change for each Success Marker. But if a community experiences a setback, the examples in the Developmental Pathway show key activities that can help get back on track.

The Developmental Pathway is used not only for grantee self-reflection, but also for Interact to develop technical assistance to grantees.

The foundation finds common themes among grantee reports and addresses educational needs at the quarterly learning collaboratives. Topics covered to date included coalition building, visioning, youth engagement, storytelling, and fundraising.

Relationship Mapping

Thriving Communities prioritizes collaboration and the development of relationships within a community. To assist communities in assessing and planning for collaboration, the Interact team facilitated a Relationship Mapping process with each grantee.

Relationship maps, also known as systems, network, or actor maps, are visual tools to identify the components of a system and how they interact with and influence one another (Gopal & Clarke, 2015; Taylor, Whatley, & Coffman, 2015).

> Actor mapping explores the relationships and connections among actors, as well as their relationships to a given issue, project or intended outcome. The purpose of actor mapping is to identify opportunities to improve a system's overall performance by, for example, strengthening weak connections or filling gaps in the system. (Gopal & Clarke, p. 2)

For a community, a relationship map can help display the connections — or lack of connections — between important stakeholders that may have power or influence over a community's ability to change. Power or influence can be formal or informal, financial or political, direct or indirect, structural or relational.

Thriving Communities grantees are led through a facilitated, hands-on process to develop their relationship maps. Key community leaders and partners are convened for the mapping exercise, typically conducted as part of an existing planning meeting. Discussion begins with the vision for the initiative — an important, level-setting activity: The participants have to agree on the vision, goal, and scope (e.g., geography, population) for the initiative. The vision becomes central to the map itself, serving as the hub from which all relationships develop.

FIGURE 3 Thriving Brown County Relationship Map, March 2015

Township trustees

Elected officials

Veteran groups

Civic groups

Job and Family Services

United Way

Mental Health Drug Addiction Board

Talbert House Brown County Counseling

Brown Co. Safe Comm.

Wellness Found.

Interact for Health.

Farmers Union

Health pros

Child.& Fam. 1st Council

Juvenile Court, Danny Charles

County courts

Ohio State Extension, Christy

Libraries

Alta Beasley, community activist

Law enforcement

News media

Common Pleas Court, Scott Gusweiler

Thriving Brown County

Western

Eastern

PTA

Grand-parents

Garden clubs

Food bank

Faith-based partners

Brown County Education Services Center, Becky Cropper

Southern Hills CTC

Brown County Schools

George-town

Parents

Riding Center

Businesses

Brown Co. Chamber

Fayette-ville

Ripley

Sports Assoc.

Residents

YPs

Kiwanis

Toast-masters

Farm Bureau

ABCAP

CAA Head Start

FFA FCCLA

Chatfield College

Southern State College

McD network

Girl/Boy Scouts

Key

Greater influence, no/little relationship as yet

Greater influence, existing relationship

Less influence, existing relationship

Less influence, no/little relationship as yet

· · · · · New relationships in the last year

⟷ Connections

Tools

Once the vision is documented, participants are asked to brainstorm a list of stakeholders who have a role in achieving that vision for the community. Stakeholders include individuals and community members, informal groups, and formal organizations or agencies. Stakeholders are then identified as having an "existing relationship" or "no/little relationship as yet." Determining the engagement level is an important conversation among participants, as stakeholders often are engaged in some aspects of the work but not others. Once the stakeholders are identified, participants are asked to determine the level of influence each has over the community's ability to achieve its vision. Identified stakeholders are noted on a large piece of paper. A stakeholder's level of influence is depicted with a circle drawn around its name — the larger the circle, the larger the degree of influence. The final step in creating the map is to draw lines depicting connections between the stakeholders. (See Figure 3.)

After the map is created, participants analyze the relationships and begin to identify next steps to strengthen the community's network:

• Who's missing from the relationship map? Are there stakeholders that can bring specific capacities, experiences, or connections?

• Where are their strengths? Gaps?

- How dependent is the network on a small number of individuals?

- What are the opportunities for growth and improvement? What is the appropriate timing for growth?

- How can existing relationships be leveraged to accomplish the next steps?

- What are potential challenges or constraints?

From these conversations, communities then develop a plan of action to build and strengthen their networks. Communities most often focus on building relationships with stakeholders that were not yet connected, but that were identified as having a great deal of influence over the community's ability to meet its goals.

As part of the Thriving Communities initiative, communities are asked to update the relationship map each year. The update serves two purposes: to encourage communities to revisit their maps and look for opportunities to build further relationships, and to document the growth of a community's network for evaluation purposes.

Grantees' Experiences With the Tools

Current Thriving Communities vary greatly. One of them is a large, rural county that covers 492 square miles, has nearly 45,000 residents, and contains several towns and five school districts that serve as hubs for community engagement. Another is an urban community of about 6,000 residents that spans 1.5 miles and has a single school district. The Urban Appalachians community is a cultural community and not identified with a single, bordered locale. Because every grantee is unique, each had a different experience with adopting and using the tools. Some did so quickly and began to benefit right away. Others did not initially see the value of the tools; for those communities, it took longer to experience the advantages.

Grantees that had experience addressing prevention issues were generally familiar with common evaluation practices used by funders that support community-led initiatives, and therefore often had fewer problems adopting the tools. One such community used the Success Markers to identify infrastructure and implementation as its initial strengths. Knowing early on that sustainability was a weakness compelled the group to focus on that aspect of the work, and it began to use a membership model to seek donations from the community. After three years, the model is so robust that the group receives annual renewals before it even requests them. This community also reported that the phases of the Developmental Pathway helped its members recognize the steps needed to evolve their work from something new to something established, and then to something flourishing. This allowed them to set realistic expectations for new programs, avoid frustration, and "not get tired of doing good," according to a team leader who shared the community's experience with the tools. And Relationship Mapping, though a struggle at first, allowed the community to see the priorities of each member of its coalition and identify groups with whom they needed to engage more, such as the business and faith-based communities.

In contrast, another urban community took longer to achieve success with the tools. The coalition's main organization was primarily concerned with community redevelopment and had not worked previously in prevention or health promotion. At first the community did not see value in the quarterly reports used to describe progress toward Success Markers; the reports were thought to be too much work for such small grants. But at a quarterly learning-collaborative meeting, a grantee from a rural community shared how it was using what it learned from the Success Markers to garner more support and additional funding from its community. This inspired the urban community to start completing the Success Markers, and as a result it was able to rapidly connect to more residents, attract other funders, and be viewed as a partner in addressing health.

Tools

For another grantee, a lack of shared community leadership resulted in problems with growth and sustainability. The community had completed a relationship map, but its ability to use the map to bring new people into the initiative was limited because the group had a strong individual leader. This leader's connections and influence contributed to some successes, such as a city grant for a new play space, but also contributed to some problems. Other members of the coalition often deferred to the leader on direction and action; the leader was also dedicating time to multiple pressing priorities outside the initiative. Momentum was lost and progress stalled. After the leader retired in 2018, the community was able to use its relationship map more effectively, allowing more coalition participants to find their voices and engage more residents, including the faith community.

All in all, Interact for Health has found that regardless of their size and composition, Thriving Communities grantees are achieving similar results when led by passionate residents equipped with the right tools to engage community members who would benefit most from health promotion.

Evaluation

Interact's evaluation was designed to measure progress and gather learnings both for the individual grantees and for the Thriving Communities portfolio as a whole. That said, Thriving Communities and other community-led, grassroots efforts to execute health promotion often do not follow a defined path and must constantly respond to change. To meet these challenges, and using the initiative's three tools as cornerstones, Interact adopted a developmental evaluation approach, which focuses on improving innovation, providing information to support timely decision-making, and engaging participants to build capacity (Patton, 2011; Parkhurst, Preskill, Lyn, & Moore, 2016). The evaluation team supported the communities' use of the tools described in this article and served as a valued outside expert in identifying areas of development for the community.

All in all, Interact for Health has found that regardless of their size and composition, Thriving Communities grantees are achieving similar results when led by passionate residents equipped with the right tools to engage community members who would benefit most from health promotion.

Upon becoming a Thriving Community, grantees completed an initial Success Markers assessment and relationship map. These served as a baseline for their work and helped kick-start the development of an action plan with key activities and milestones to be achieved. The Success Markers are used as the foundation for quarterly reports to the learning collaborative, in which communities share key activities, challenges, and opportunities. Grantees submit an annual evaluation report that includes an update of the relationship map and Success Markers, using the Developmental Pathway to assess a community's progress on each dimension of community-based health promotion. Throughout the process, grantees are asked to offer feedback on the tools to ensure that they provide value to them as well as to Interact for Health.

The annual report also includes a narrative and a financial report. (See Appendix.) Grantees are asked to:

- Provide a brief summary of their Thriving Community's efforts.

- Discuss goals that have been achieved and those that are in progress.

- Identify up to five lessons they learned because of the grant.

Adopting all three tools allows community-led initiatives to be viable, ongoing sources of health promotion that can reach beyond institutions to engage community members who otherwise might be left out.

- Share a brief story that illustrates the effects of their Thriving Communities efforts.

- Discuss the long-term vision for their Thriving Communities work.

- Describe what they want to accomplish in the upcoming year to move closer to their vision.

- Provide an updated action plan for the next year.

The Thriving Communities evaluation team reviews each quarterly and annual report to document changes in community capacity for health promotion, noting progress in achieving the Success Markers, identifying facilitators and barriers for both individual communities and for the portfolio of grantees; and tracking the financial health and sustainability of the initiatives.

In November 2018, Interact for Health completed an internal, midpoint evaluation of its Thriving Communities grantmaking. As part of this evaluation, 100 people involved in the initiative who agreed to be contacted were asked to assess the value of the three tools in their community work. The 41 who responded overwhelmingly rated the tools as highly valuable and attested to their importance in the success of community-led initiatives; many respondents said coaching from the program officer helped them adopt and use the tools. On a scale of 1 to 5, all three tools received an overall rating higher than 4. Regarding the Success Markers, one grantee

said that evaluating its strengths and weaknesses at the beginning

> helped us set our direction and vision. The act of reporting on our Success Markers has kept us focused on what we need to do — as evidenced by the fact we have often reported out activities related to Success Markers that at the beginning we said were our weakest areas.

The results of this evaluation will help Interact improve practices with Cohorts 2 and 3 as these groups complete their five-year Thriving Communities journeys.

Conclusion

The development of the three Thriving Communities tools is driven by the need to create methodologies that build capacity to lead community-engaged health promotion and to document the impact of Interact for Health's financial and technical support. Each tool plays a unique role in a continuous learning process with grantees. The Success Markers focus grantees on the key aspects of community-led health promotion. The Developmental Pathway documents communities' adaptations and progress for each of the Success Markers. Relationship Mapping provides communities with a visual representation of their stakeholders and connections to improve their community-building activities. While Interact is still learning from this evaluation model, early evidence of its effectiveness is promising.

Adopting all three tools allows community-led initiatives to be viable, ongoing sources of health promotion that can reach beyond institutions to engage community members who otherwise might be left out. When more of these community members participate in planning and implementing proven approaches and have consistent access to coaching and tools to build and strengthen each component, the initiative advances more rapidly and devises new practical solutions that can have long-lasting effects on the community.

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Tools

APPENDIX Annual Report Template

Annual Report

Grantee:

Name of project:

Project goal:

Project ID:

Date final report is due:

Program officer:

Please provide the following information.

Date annual report is submitted:

Reporting Period:

1. **Grant Summary**
   Provide a brief summary (2 to 4 paragraphs) of your Thriving Communities efforts in 2017. Discuss the goals (infrastructure, programming, sustainability) that have been achieved and those that are still in progress. (Please reference the 2017 Action Plan).

2. **Action Plan Summary**
   Discuss the long-term vision for your Thriving Communities work. What would you like to accomplish in 2018 to help move closer to your vision? (Please provide an updated 2018 Action Plan as an attachment to the report.)

3. **Success Markers Summary**
   Please provide a summary of your communities' progress for each of the seven Success Markers in the section below.

	Success Marker	Emerging	Expanding	Sustaining
Infrastructure	**People see everyone has a role to play in health promotion.**	• Narrow/limited group is not fully representative of community demographic. • Community engagement is not a key organizing principle for the group and is often overlooked or forgotten. • The group understands that broad engagement is essential to success, but has yet to identify and/or execute strategies to act on that. • An initial plan is developed for broader engagement.	• There is the right mix of community members and organizational representatives invested in the work. • There is intentional discussion on who to connect and how (relationship map). • Strategies are executive to develop broad community representation (an open invitation/door). • A variety of community members are engaged, but power (decision-making, information) is centralized within a small group.	• Health promotion efforts are community-led. • Relationships are strengthened/deepened. • Relationships are intentionally leveraged to build broader engagement. • Specific calls to action-right time and right way to engaged-very focused and targeted efforts. • Leadership is shared between community members and professionals. • Refinement of community engagement strategies is intentional and ongoing. • Structures/systems enable ongoing engagement and participation.

A. **Progress and Achievements:** What has been achieved under the Success Marker? (Please be specific in terms of the characteristics from the Developmental Pathway.)

B. **Next Steps:** What are the next steps to ensure progress?

APPENDIX (continued)

Tools

	Success Marker	Emerging	Expanding	Sustaining
Infrastructure	**People are engaged in a common/ shared vision for health promotion.**	• There is no vision. • There is shared belief. • The focus is on a single health priority.	• Opportunities are in place for community members to influence the development and refinement of the vision. • A broad vision for health promotion is under development. • Conversion from priority-focused to health-promotion vision is underway. • Vision serves as cornerstone for community efforts (decisions and activities).	• A collaboratively developed vision is in place. • The vision is communicated frequently to create shared ownership, and is known by the community. • There is a process to validate vision-revisiting.

A. **Progress and Achievements:** What has been achieved under the Success Marker? (Please be specific in terms of the characteristics from the Developmental Pathway.)

B. **Next Steps:** What are the next steps to ensure progress?

	Success Marker	Emerging	Expanding	Sustaining
Infrastructure	**Health-promotion efforts are coordinated.**	• There is awareness of other community efforts, but no coordination. • An Action Plan is in development. • Activities are sporadic and piecemeal. • There is no communication across groups working in the community. • Leadership is limited and centralized.	• An Action Plan is developed. • A subset of activities is coordinated, but there is no broad communication. • A formal infrastructure for supporting communication and coordination is in development. • Multiple people are leading activities (programming, fundraising, infrastructure). • There is a plan for leadership development. • There is a shared-leadership model.	• A formal, effective infrastructure supports coordination and communication. • Community recognizes them as "go to" resources. • There are clear communication streams/networks. • The vision, activities, and action plan are linked.

A. **Progress and Achievements:** What has been achieved under the Success Marker? (Please be specific in terms of the characteristics from the Developmental Pathway.)

B. **Next Steps:** What are the next steps to ensure progress?

APPENDIX (continued)

	Success Marker	Emerging	Expanding	Sustaining
Programming	**People understand and are using evidence-based practices (i.e., programs, frameworks).**	• There is no knowledge of these practices. • Self-created practices are in place. • Practices are in place without intentionality. • Emerging/evidence-based practices are being investigated.	• Investigation of emerging or evidence-based practices is guided by the community vision and research • Self-created practices are aligned with knowledge, research, emerging or evidence-based practices. • Evidence-based practices are implemented when appropriate and with intentionality.	• Planning is data-driven. • Emerging or evidence-based practices are responsive to community needs and are fully executed, with monitoring procedures in place. • The community infuses continuous improvement practices into emerging- or evidence-based-practice activities.

A. **Progress and Achievements:** What has been achieved under the Success Marker? (Please be specific in terms of the characteristics from the Developmental Pathway.)

B. **Next Steps:** What are the next steps to ensure progress?

	Success Marker	Emerging	Expanding	Sustaining
Programming	**Health-promotion efforts focus on a variety of approaches.**	• No approaches are identified. • Limited programming is in place, but not linked to a health-promotion framework. • There is no focus or emphasis; targets for approaches are general or unplanned/uncoordinated. • The community is engaging in promotion or programs (universal, selected, indicated). • The community is building an understanding of a health-promotion framework.	• The community is engaging in promotion and programs. • The community starts to explore policy and physical projects. • Efforts are not comprehensive and are limited to a narrow range of approaches (universal, selected, indicated). • Efforts are aligning toward a more comprehensive approach. • The community has identified policies to target for change. • The community is advocating for a shared agenda for change or enforcement of policies.	• The community is using a variety of approaches (universal, selected, indicated) for promotion, programs, policy, and physical projects. • Health policies are adopted and enforced.

A. **Progress and Achievements:** What has been achieved under the Success Marker? (Please be specific in terms of the characteristics from the Developmental Pathway.)

B. **Next Steps:** What are the next steps to ensure progress?

Tools

APPENDIX (continued)

Tools

	Success Marker	Emerging	Expanding	Sustaining
Programming	**Health promotion efforts are data-informed.**	• Efforts are not guided by data or information, but rather by individuals and agendas. • Evaluation or data-collection efforts are in development. • Activities and efforts are not reviewed for key learnings and do not inform future decisions or work. • Initial needs assessment is complete and may inform decisions.	• The needs/asset assessment is updated and refined. • Appropriate needs assessment is periodically used. • A needs/asset assessment drives the Action Plan. • A system for reviewing data and information is being tested. • Evaluation data are being collected, but do not inform decision-making.	• Needs assessment becomes part of the normal process. • Assessments and Action Plans are updated and reviewed regularly. • Activities have an evaluation component that is reviewed and informs shared decision-making. • The community is driven by its own vision and goals, not those of funders. Data and learning inform the community vision and goals, and support sustainability efforts.

A. **Progress and Achievements:** What has been achieved under the Success Marker? (Please be specific in terms of the characteristics from the Developmental Pathway.)

B. **Next Steps:** What are the next steps to ensure progress?

APPENDIX (continued)

	Success Marker	Emerging	Expanding	Sustaining
Sustainability	**Health promotion efforts are sustained.**	• Resources, finances are limited. • Fiscal agent/sponsor relationship is established. • A budget has been developed. • No plan is in place to gather additional resources. • No sustainability plan has been developed. • There is participation in sustainability consults. • An initial community narrative/story is developed.	• Income is not diversified (i.e., limited to grants). • Infrastructure is developed to support sustainability efforts: fundraising and friend-raising • There is committed capacity/ leadership for fundraising accountability. • Match dollars are garnered. • The budget is monitored and updated. • A fundraising plan has been developed. • A fiscal structure/ management plan has been developed. • Alignment with Thriving Communities and fiscal sponsor is reassessed. • Fund/friend-raising activities are being executed. • Focus is on diversity of resources. • The narrative/story is expanded to include current work and results of efforts, • A narrative/story is utilized to garner additional resources.	• There is an active, successful friend- and fundraising committee. • The fundraising plan successfully executed. • Champions, allies, and gatekeepers are supportive and vocal. • Funds are in place to support ongoing efforts. • Funding is diversified; a multitude of partners are engaged. • The Thriving Communities group takes on expanded roles in the community. • A narrative/story is continuously updated and shared to grow financial, human, and political capital. Thriving Communities has the financial, human, and political capital to maintain and expand.

A. **Progress and Achievements:** What has been achieved under the Success Marker? (Please be specific in terms of the characteristics from the Developmental Pathway.)

B. **Next Steps:** What are the next steps to ensure progress?

Tools

APPENDIX (continued)

4. **Lessons Learned**
   Identity up to five lessons you learned as a result of the grant (e.g., the facilitator and barriers, policy implications, and system changes).

5. **Story**
   Share a brief story (1–2 paragraphs) that illustrates the effects of your Thriving Communities efforts in 2016–2017.

6. **Attachments**
   Please include electronic copies of:

   • The 2018 Action Plan (please review your 2017 Action Plan and make edits to reflect your goals for 2018). Action Plans must reflect work in each of the following areas:

     o Infrastructure or coalition development

     o Community-based programming

     o Sustainability

   • Any public recognition, awards, press releases, professional articles, presentations, products, etc., pertinent to your Thriving Communities efforts. If you would like to include photos, please send them in a separate Word document.

7. **Financial Report**
   Provide a brief narrative. How did the money get used?

   Reporting period:

Equity for All: Building the Infrastructure for Change Through Community-First Funder Collaboratives

Ellen Braff-Guajardo, M.Ed., J.D., Kaying Hang, M.P.H., and Leslie Cooksy, Ph,D., Sierra Health Foundation; Monica Braughton, M.P.H., Harder+Company Community Research; and Fontane Lo, M.P.P., James Irvine Foundation

Introduction

Funder collaboratives are a powerful and enduring approach to uniting philanthropic resources and expertise around a shared interest in order to learn from, leverage, and deepen each participant's impact. In recent years, funder collaboratives have become more common as a tool for increasing and coordinating philanthropic investments to address the root causes of inequity (Fine, Lawrence, & Schultz Hafid, 2018), while staying responsive to shifting needs and political priorities (McCarthy, Bornstein, Perrin, James, & Fulton; 2017; Seldon, 2015).

Research and experience have identified practices that increase the likelihood of success in funder collaboratives: having a shared vision, identifying clear goals, establishing honest relationships, having strong backbone management, leveraging the collective strengths of the participants, and being flexible and humble in the face of emerging needs and contexts (Leland, 2017; Porter, James, Medina, & Chow, 2017). Community voice, however, is a crucial — and often missing — element that enables funder collaboratives to use equitable practices of partnership and power-sharing in pursuing a more equitable world.

This article describes a "community first" model, which emerged from the experience of a funders collaborative created to advance equity through policy and systems change in California's San Joaquin Valley. The community-first model was developed in response to the needs of a region with a deep history of racial disparities and a

> ### Key Points
>
> - Foundations increasingly recognize that improving conditions in many communities requires addressing inequities in access to rights and resources. Yet there are challenges to effective investment in underresourced regions, especially when foundations have limited familiarity with the region and may assume limited local capacity to leverage philanthropic investments.
>
> - This article discusses how Sierra Health Foundation partnered with other California and national foundations to establish the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund, a collaborative whose grants focus on strengthening the capacity of communities and organizations in the Valley to advance policy and systems changes that promote health and racial equity.
>
> - This article highlights the groundwork that facilitated the fund's success, examines the strategies that ensured a community-first orientation, and reflects on how foundations can utilize this approach elsewhere to build the infrastructure needed to advance equity for all.

dearth of philanthropic and public investment. Funders working in other regions with similar histories could use this approach, which joins the concepts of funder collaboration, funder-grantee collaboration, and community empowerment.

After a brief overview of the model, this article describes the San Joaquin Valley funders

In 2013, Sierra Health Foundation explored a new model in which funders' collective investments are driven by the voices and priorities of marginalized communities.

collaborative. Drawing on research conducted to document the collaborative, the article presents its successes and challenges, with implications for replicating the approach.

What Is a Community-First Funder Collaborative?

Many philanthropic organizations are well-acquainted with and committed to supporting regions and communities that experience persistent racism, marginalization, and lack of investment that have limited residents' opportunities for optimal health and well-being. These communities span the United States, reaching from California's San Joaquin Valley across to the Southwest, the South, Appalachia, and through the Rust Belt. While each community has a unique context, they share experiences with racial, economic, environmental, educational, and social discrimination and the consequences of poverty, inadequate housing and public transportation, exposure to environmental hazards, limited access to high-quality education and living-wage jobs, and poor health. These conditions are often compounded by histories of underinvestment that resulted in weak systems and infrastructure, which can in turn limit new investment.

In 2013, Sierra Health Foundation explored a new model in which funders' collective investments are driven by the voices and priorities of marginalized communities. Together with community organizations and both local and national funders, Sierra Health Foundation and the Center at Sierra Health Foundation (an affiliated, independent nonprofit organization)

established the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund to achieve health and racial equity in California's San Joaquin Valley. The fund's community-first funder collaborative model includes several key components:

- an explicit focus on achieving equity through locally prioritized, locally led policy and systems change;

- a place-based approach that takes into account the interconnected issues that a community or region faces, rather than focusing on a single issue;

- pooled funds from numerous philanthropic partners who are looking to make their resources go farther and deeper in achieving impact;

- grants to local organizations that infuse a community with resources to support advocacy, leadership development, and community organizing activities;

- capacity-building support to facilitate community-partner ownership and leadership of policy and systems change efforts, such as training opportunities, tailored technical assistance, and opportunities to network and collaborate with community colleagues locally, regionally, and across issue areas in service of policy and systems change;

- a collaborative structure and network that brings funder partners and community partners together (funder partners gain knowledge and relationships in these hard-to-reach communities, and local organizations gain access and exposure to a broader network of funders in the state and nation); and

- a locally based organizing entity to manage the collaborative's funds, facilitate effective collaboration and communication, support capacity building among community partners, and serve as a trusted local intermediary for funder partners.

Reflective Practice

The Case of the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund

California's San Joaquin Valley is one of the most culturally diverse and economically important regions of the state. Its nine counties span more than 28,000 square miles and are home to over 4 million people and a strong agricultural industry that generates almost $40 billion a year in exports. The rich cultural diversity of the Valley — which includes Latino, Southeast Asian, African American, indigenous, refugee, and other racial and ethnic communities — brings vibrant cultural practices, entrepreneurship, and vital workplace skills to the regional economy. Furthermore, local community-based organizations are building on the United Farm Workers' legacy of community organizing and protest to "build the capacity of immigrants, People of Color and low-income populations to advocate for policies and systems that promote equity" (Hartzog, Abrams, Erbstein, London, & Watterson, 2017, p. 5).

Despite these economic and social assets, more than one in four of the region's children are in households living below the federal poverty level (Hartzog, Abrams, Erbstein, London, & Watterson, 2016). Economic inequities in the region are compounded by histories of racial and ethnic residential segregation. More than 30 percent of the population lives in unincorporated areas with little infrastructure to support clean drinking water, sewage treatment, sidewalks, and other services (PolicyLink, 2013). Disparities in living conditions and other determinants of health have contributed to the region's high rates of asthma, obesity, heart disease mortality, and homicide, among other health issues (Hartzog et al., 2016). Agriculture is the region's economic mainstay and lifeblood of its people, yet the lack of strong policy and regulation has been the root of pervasive environmental and health injustices.

While the need for investment in the region and its residents is great, per capita support from federal agencies is only 73 percent that of the national average. The region's nonprofits also have fewer resources. According to an analysis of data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics, nonprofits in the Valley are funded at only 50 percent of the national average (Great Valley Center, 2014).

Developing the Model: Putting Communities First

Recognizing the inequities and underinvestment in the Valley, Sierra Health Foundation's leadership began to explore strategies for investing in the region in 2013. The foundation's president and CEO; vice president of programs and partnerships; and director of health programs conducted community listening tours to meet with Valley residents and stakeholders at house parties and community centers. These tours allowed the foundation and its philanthropic partners to hear directly from the community and see firsthand the challenges Valley residents faced. Community members and stakeholders offered important suggestions on how to approach engagement in the Valley:

- Listen to residents of the impacted communities, with no set funding agenda.

- Maintain a physical presence in the Valley, with local staff who are familiar with the region's resources and challenges.

- Invest directly in local organizations embedded in the community.

- "Bring others along" by partnering with key influencers and local organizations to address the region's deep-rooted and complex needs.

Hearing directly from community residents strengthened the foundation's determination to invest in the region and confirmed that organizations in the Valley supported an approach of strengthening local capacity to advocate for more equitable policies and systems advocacy in and for their own communities. As a result, the fund was launched in 2014 with initial funding from the foundation and The California Endowment. The fund's ambitious, five-year vision set forth a plan to invest at least $10 million in the Valley and build a network of at least 100 local, funded

partner organizations advocating for policy and systems changes in their communities and the region to advance health and racial equity.

Management of the Fund

The fund is managed by the Center at Sierra Health Foundation. Established by the foundation in 2012, the center operates as an independent nonprofit that is supported by foundation leadership, staff, and infrastructure, and seeks to eradicate inequities throughout California. The center serves as an intermediary or backbone organization for several projects and allows for the aggregation of funds from multiple sources, including local and state government, as well as philanthropic organizations.

The center's infrastructure and established role as a backbone organization have been an important aspect of the fund's development and administration. It is responsible for administering grantmaking for the fund, implementing its capacity-building and advocacy activities, developing the regional network of nonprofit and community partners, working with funder partners, and cultivating new funder and community partnerships. The center has decision-making power over the fund, with leadership from foundation staff.

Since its launch, the fund has granted more than $6 million to 90 local organizations. Eighteen state and national funders have invested their resources and expertise in the work of the fund. While most of the grants are relatively modest (up to $20,000), the fund has also offered larger, multiyear "cluster" grants of up to $600,000 that support groups of three to four community partners to work together towards a common policy target. Regardless of grant size, partnership with the fund gives community partners access to a broad suite of technical assistance and other resources to strengthen their work and ongoing opportunities to connect with a broader network of community organizations working on related issues.

Key Strategies

The fund was developed to strengthen the capacity of communities and organizations in the San Joaquin Valley to advocate for policy and systems change while concurrently building a regional movement for the advancement of health and racial equity. Underlying that mission is a deep commitment to partnering with community-based grantees, as well as philanthropic and other funding organizations — a commitment reflected in the use of the term "community partners" rather than "grantees." To accomplish this mission, the fund employs six interconnecting strategies in partnership with community partners and in consultation with funder partners. (See Figure 1.)

1. Policy and systems change: A key component of the model is a focus on achieving equity through policy and systems change. That focus, however, does not help a collaborative identify which systems changes are most needed. Similar to other place-based initiatives, the fund looks not at a single issue, but at the broad landscape of the region's opportunities and challenges; then, as a community-first collaborative, the fund follows the lead of community partners in establishing funding priorities. With support from staff, a committee of more than 50 community partners worked together to set policy priorities for the region and the fund, and then developed a policy platform that establishes a framework of five issues: health, education, environment, land-use planning, and immigration.[1] Within those issue areas, the platform identifies policy and systems-change solutions to improve the health and well-being of vulnerable children and families, and advance racial equity and social justice regionwide.

2. Community organizing and leadership development: The priority given to community organizing and leadership development is expressed in funding decisions, which favor applications that include those strategies. The fund is trying to build

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[1] For the 2018 policy platform, see http://www.shfcenter.org/equity-on-the-mall.

a movement by supporting the capacity of communities to organize and have their voices heard by policymakers, and thus funds organizations that are committed to identifying and training community residents with lived experience of the Valley's inequities to lead advocacy efforts. In a region that has historically excluded people of color from access to equitable opportunity, focusing on the power of local leaders and other residents is both critical to the movement-building mission of the fund and responsive to community input provided during the listening tours. The residents have the most at stake and are experts in what their communities need, and therefore have a central role in advocating for change. This strategy is reflected in the fund's annual advocacy event, Equity on the Mall, which brings Valley residents to the state's capitol to share their stories and hold

elected officials accountable for addressing the region's needs. In 2018, more than 1,500 community leaders, organizers, families, youth, and others participated in the event, which was attended by numerous legislative leaders; presented the 2018 San Joaquin Valley Health Fund policy platform; and held a forum for residents to discuss how gubernatorial candidates planned to address such key Valley issues as water access, air quality, and poverty.

3. Leveraging political capital and leadership: Political capital is the ability to leverage one's influence, relationships, and power to bring about policy change. As an entity that holds relationships with community members, funders, and policymakers, the fund has grown its political capital and leadership, and uses it in service of the region. Early on, for example, it developed

The fund has been intentional from the start about funding small, local organizations, which previously may not have had direct access to funders and more often received regranted funding from larger, statewide advocacy organizations. These smaller organizations are critical to the success of the community-first model because they represent and work closely with the most vulnerable residents of the Valley.

a relationship with the Reinvent South Stockton Coalition, creating a connection with Michael Tubbs, then a member of the city council and now the mayor of Stockton, California. Tubbs has since taken a lead role in convening other elected officials through the San Joaquin Valley Leadership Executive Committee, which advocates for increased investment in the Valley and its residents by raising awareness of their assets and opportunities. The fund's philanthropic partners also play a role in broadening access to key decision-makers and gaining their support and participation at events like Equity on the Mall.

4. Education and knowledge: Learning directly and proactively from organizations and residents in the region rather than imposing an existing agenda is core to how the fund approaches its work and reflects guidance received during the listening tours. For example, the fund asks applicants for funding to identify their own

policy focus and explain how they know it is a need in their community. In response, the applicants often describe community meetings and other approaches for gathering local input, as well as providing research data. Analyzing the applications allow fund staff to gain insight into local priorities, needs, and opportunities. The fund has also commissioned research to inform the center's planning, fundraising, and advocacy efforts and educate others about the Valley's inequities and assets. This research, prepared by the University of California-Davis Center for Regional Change, has highlighted specific communities with the greatest opportunity for change (London & Watterson, 2015), as well as racial and health inequities experienced by children across the Valley (Hartzog et al., 2016) and advocacy efforts in Kern County (Hartzog et al., 2017).

5. Effective communication: Communication is at the core of successful relationships with community members. This strategy stresses the importance of how fund staff and community partners interact, as well as how the fund amplifies community voices. To build trusting relationships with community partners, the center opened an office in the San Joaquin Valley and hired local staff as program officers, as recommended during the listening tours. In addition to regular in-person convenings of community and funder partners, the fund uses common communication approaches such as site visits, webinars, social media, and a weekly e-mail update to community partners that shares advocacy, funding and learning opportunities, and other resources. The fund also uses its partnerships with external stakeholders, such as reporters and statewide advocates, and events like Equity on the Mall to increase the reach of the voices, experiences, and perspectives of community residents.

6. Strengthening organizations and networks: In the model, grant funding is used to incentivize participation in and subsidize staff

time for capacity-building activities and connecting with other advocates to build a regional movement. The fund has been intentional from the start about funding small, local organizations, which previously may not have had direct access to funders and more often received regranted funding from larger, statewide advocacy organizations. These smaller organizations are critical to the success of the community-first model because they represent and work closely with the most vulnerable residents of the Valley. By including and building capacity among these organizations, the fund has benefited from their deep knowledge of community and regional issues. Capacity-building activities include regular convenings of all community partners, webinars and other virtual learning opportunities, and site visits. The fund requires participation in convenings as a way to create opportunities for networking. In-person convenings create space to share experiences and information and are also used to provide training on such topics as lobbying rules, ways to support increased access to safe drinking water in the Valley and throughout California, and other policy advocacy opportunities.

Although presented separately, the strategies of the fund are necessarily intertwined. For example, the policy platform was the result of the intersection of strategies around community leadership, networking, and political leverage. Similarly, Equity on the Mall is one of the fund's most effective communication strategies, while also leveraging political capital and organizing community residents to advocate for regional policy and systems changes that they prioritized.

Implementation: Early Successes, Challenges, and Lessons

While the San Joaquin Valley's context is unique, the realities that its residents face are not. Therefore, the fund's experience can provide guidance to those interested in replicating the community-first funder collaborative model in other regions. Recognizing this potential, the center partnered with Harder+Company Community Research in 2017 to document the fund's model and describe highlights and challenges in its implementation. The research, funded by the W.K. Kellogg and Sierra Health foundations and carried out in 2017–2018, included interviews with the fund's philanthropic partners, staff, and other stakeholders (n = 25); a survey of community-based grantee partners (n = 38 of the 73 partners in 2017); and review of the fund's internal documents.[2] This section summarizes key findings of the research and identifies considerations for implementing the community-first funder collaborative model elsewhere.

Spurring a Regional Movement With a Collective Agenda for Change

Initial findings indicate that the fund has helped to seed a regional movement for change. In interviews, funders and community partners pointed to both the policy platform and Equity on the Mall as two early successes that have propelled the fund's work. The policy platform clarifies the fund's approach to improving health and racial equity and encourages community partners from across sectors and focus areas to work together towards common goals; Equity on the Mall reinforces the policy platform's unified voice. Craig Martinez, program manager of funder partner The California Endowment, observes:

> Equity on the Mall is one of those places where [the fund has] been particularly successful. To really see partners who represent a diversity of issues come together with a shared priority, being able to share a perspective, and really focus on the needs of an underinvested region — I think it's really phenomenal.

The implication of this finding is that a community-first funder collaborative can facilitate a regional movement by organizing opportunities for shared advocacy, such as public events and policy documents.

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[2] For a detailed report of the research, see Harder+Company Community Research, 2018a.

A community-first funder collaborative can have an important role in connecting funder partners to community organizations. These connections can increase philanthropic investment in the region outside of the collaborative.

Expanding the Network of Partnerships

In addition, the fund has increased the size and strength of the network of organizations mobilizing across issue areas and county lines to achieve health and racial equity in the Valley. Community partners reported that fund convenings, shared work on the policy platform, and other activities have increased their connections with other advocates and helped to unite the voices of organizations tackling similar issues. Almost 90 percent of the respondents to the survey of community partners said that they increased experience, knowledge, or skills related to connecting with other funded partners.

Jesus Martinez, executive director of one funded organization, the Central Valley Immigrant Integration Collaborative, described the fund's partner convenings as critical for expanding their understanding of communities across the region:

> An even greater value [beyond financial support] has been the connection to all the other organizations [and] the ability to learn from them. The organizations that we've been connected to via this fund, they know the local communities; they know what is significant to them. … You really can't put a price on that.

Consistent with this perspective, more than 70 percent of survey respondents reported increasing their work on shared policy goals with other organizations and connecting with other key stakeholders in the region. This finding indicates the importance of activities explicitly intended to build connections and of incentives for community partner participation.

Strengthening Capacity for Policy and Systems Change

A community-first funder collaborative will likely need to build the capacity of community partners to engage in advocacy, especially among smaller local organizations in underresourced regions. According to survey respondents, the fund has had some success in increasing the capacity of individual organizations to advocate for equitable policies and systems. Overall, 87 percent of respondents agreed that the fund accelerated their organizations' ability to achieve systems and policy change. In particular, they reported that participation in the fund increased their experience, knowledge, or skills related to advancing health and racial equity (63 percent), advocacy for policy change (57 percent), and engaging community residents in advocacy efforts (55 percent).

The fund's grants also strengthen capacity for policy and systems-change advocacy. One community partner remarked, "We absolutely could not have done this policy work without [the] funding." While some community partners indicated that the small grants should be increased in size or length (a sentiment echoed by some funders and external stakeholders), the majority (63 percent) of the partners responding to the survey reported that they received sufficient funding for their participation. One partner remarked that "although the grant size is small, the [fund's] staff enhance opportunities for the organizations to increase skills, network with others, and also [offer a] platform to advocate on a large scale."

Addressing the Needs of Diverse Community Partners

While the fund has had some success in building capacity for policy and systems change, the wide range of experiences, skills, and focus areas across funded organizations can be a challenge in community-first funder collaboratives,

which prioritize funding for local partners. The partners vary in their organizational history, constituents, funding stability, advocacy expertise, and areas of focus. This diversity is a strength of the network as they come together, but means that the staff of a community-first funder collaborative must try to tailor support to the different needs.

The fund has addressed this by including peer-to-peer learning with panel presentations from the community partners who have deeper experience in policy and systems-change advocacy than others and providing one-on-one assistance during site visits. The fund has also added optional technical assistance activities based on specific requests from community partners to the extent that resources allow. However, providing the right technical supports requires ongoing attention if the collaborative is going to be truly inclusive of small, community-based organizations.

Increasing Philanthropic Investment in the Region

A community-first funder collaborative can have an important role in connecting funder partners to community organizations. These connections can increase philanthropic investment in the region outside of the collaborative. Beyond the fund's direct grantmaking activities, community partners reported that the fund increased their ability to obtain grants from other sources. Two-thirds of community partners responding to the survey found that the fund's ability to connect them with other funders had been very or extremely helpful, and 49 percent reported an increased ability to obtain funding from other sources. This result was supported by comments from funder partners. For example, Fatima Angeles, vice president of programs at the California Wellness Foundation, said its partnership with the fund "allows us to learn more about what's happening in the area. … We are a more informed funder, and because we are more informed, we are investing more in the region."

Several funder partners noted that previous interest in investing in the San Joaquin Valley had been constrained by their narrow knowledge

By design, a community-first funder collaborative includes a diverse group of stakeholders, including community partners, current and potential funders, policymakers, other advocates, and the general public. Each stakeholder group will have differing levels of interest, engagement, and understanding of the funder collaborative's goals and will be curious about different aspects of the fund.

of the region and their limited capacity to increase that knowledge. The mechanisms of the fund — including the pooled funding structure, management by a trusted philanthropic partner, and local staff — enabled funders to invest in the region with greater confidence. This was particularly important for state and national funders, as well as those without prior experience funding organizations in the Valley. Melina Sanchez, a program officer at the James Irvine Foundation, reported that the pooled fund "makes it easy for investors who aren't based in the Central Valley to still allocate resources while feeling that the work will be community-driven."

While some of these mechanisms are not unique to community-first funder collaboratives, the emphasis on using local knowledge to guide grantmaking decisions is an essential aspect of the model.

Communicating With Multiple Stakeholders

By design, a community-first funder collaborative includes a diverse group of stakeholders,

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[T]he fund works to retain current funders while also adding new ones. One way that it has been successful in retaining funder partners is by ensuring that contributions fit the goals and strategies of the fund while also meeting the goals of the contributing foundations.

including community partners, current and potential funders, policymakers, other advocates, and the general public. Each stakeholder group will have differing levels of interest, engagement, and understanding of the funder collaborative's goals and will be curious about different aspects of the fund. For example, a potential funder is likely to be very interested in the pooled fund's logistics, whereas a legislator may only be interested in the collaborative's policy priorities. These diverse audiences can make it complex to communicate the value or key components of the model.

Through interviews and document reviews, the research team found that although staff and partners of the fund were challenged in explaining the fund's work in the early years, they have increased their ability to describe the work and to tailor their messages effectively. The use of Harder+Company's research to develop a guide to community-first funder collaboratives is an example of the fund's communication efforts (Harder+Company Community Research, 2018b). Even with these resources, however, when working on multiple issues in regions with a range of populations and geographies, communicating clearly about a community-first funder collaborative's purpose and goals is a continuously evolving process.

Demonstrating Progress and Impact

Evaluating progress and impact can be challenging in any intervention with the goal of changing policies and systems in order to create a more equitable society. In a community-first funder collaborative, this challenge is compounded because community partners are pursuing a variety of policies and systems changes and tailoring their advocacy work to the local context. The fund, for example, did not set out with predetermined outcomes in order to provide the space for community partners to identify the priorities of the communities that they work in and with. Although particularly challenging for a policy and systems-change initiative, tracking and measuring progress are often vital to sustain momentum and keep partners engaged in the advocacy process. During its initial years, the fund has used tools such as journalism, social media, and visual storytelling to document and communicate its early successes and challenges.

As it has matured, the fund has begun to add other evaluation tools, such as a dashboard of indicators of health and racial equity, process indicators related to capacity-building and advocacy training, and participatory evaluation of its larger grants. This flexible approach can help a community-first funder collaborative to document its progress, share successes, and make adjustments while its implementation continues to evolve.

Sustaining the Work

Funder collaboratives, community-first or otherwise, have the ongoing challenge of sustainability. The San Joaquin Valley Health Fund has grown significantly over the last four years to include new grants, partners, and activities — which also increases the cost of managing the work. In a region without a strong nonprofit sector and little public investment, philanthropic partners are the source of the funds needed to maintain the quality, breadth, and depth of the fund's activities.

To accomplish this, the fund works to retain current funders while also adding new ones.

One way that it has been successful in retaining funder partners is by ensuring that contributions fit the goals and strategies of the fund while also meeting the goals of the contributing foundations. For example, some local organizations receive funding directly from funder partners rather than through the fund, but are nonetheless community partners of the fund, participating in convenings and other activities, and receiving site visits from and reporting to fund staff. By providing a variety of ways to contribute and leveraging its network of current funders, the fund has been able to expand its network from two in 2014 to 18 funder partners now. While the future of the fund is unknown, the flexibility and opportunity it offers to funder partners has thus far enabled it to continue to support and grow the network of community partners.

Moving Forward

The San Joaquin Valley Health Fund's community-first funder collaborative model grew out of what the founding funders heard at the community listening tours and their commitment to community-driven change. It started as an exploration into how to build a movement in a region with great needs and has developed into a partnership of local organizations and funders working to create a more equitable San Joaquin Valley.

The fund faces challenges, particularly related to supporting organizations with a range of skills and needs; evaluating a locally driven, multi-issue, regionally focused initiative; and communicating the progress and successes that have been achieved. However, through the fund, the funder and community partners have brought attention, investments, and capacity-building resources to the Valley. It illustrates how the community-first funder collaborative model puts the priorities of the communities experiencing the greatest inequities at the center of the work. A community-first funder collaborative invests in local organizations, provides support and connections that go beyond funding and traditional technical assistance, and is guided by priorities established by community residents.

When philanthropy aims to advance equity, it makes sense to use a model that seeks to create a partnership between funders and community — a model that seeks to act equitably by putting the community first.

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Reflective Practice

A Partnered Approach to School Change in a Rural Community: Reflections and Recommendations

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Introduction

Efforts to improve U.S. schools are critically important to preparing students with skills to adapt to new technologies, enter the workforce, and become ethical, engaged citizens. Many decisions about education policies and practices are made at the local level, by school boards and administrators. Community-based foundations, therefore, are in a unique position to support and work with schools in taking a comprehensive, systematic approach to improving the lives of children and youth.

Aside from the obvious asset of financial resources, foundations are able to be strategic in their efforts and offer lengthy, ongoing support — a commitment critical to success. Foundations can become conveners and thought partners, bringing in outside perspectives and resources to tackle some of education's most thorny challenges. In doing so, they can improve learning experiences, well-being, and long-term outcomes for young people. This work has broad implications in small communities: Local education systems drive the economic landscape by training the future workforce.

Despite these opportunities, foundations face many challenges in engaging with local schools. Consider the measurable goal of raising student achievement, which involves a range of factors: school readiness, home environment, school leadership, cultural norms for achievement, and others (Kania, Kramer, & Russell, 2014). Some elements, like home environment and school

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Key Points

- With so many education policies and practices made at the local level, community-based foundations are in a unique position to support their local school districts in taking a comprehensive, systematic approach to improving the lives of young people. This article describes a research–practice partnership designed to produce school improvement in a rural community in western Virginia and reflects on a three-year collaboration among The Alleghany Foundation, two school districts, and the University of Virginia.

- The partners identified challenges and strengths within the school districts and the community; gathered and analyzed existing district data and new findings from interviews and surveys of stakeholders; identified problems and promising programs to address them; and developed and communicated a plan for action. Now, the schools, working with the foundation and the community, are implementing that plan.

- The collaboration provided clear evidence that sustained change will occur only if it aligns with the goals of school leaders and fully engages members of the community, and it sheds light on the unique challenges and strengths present in a small rural community that will influence foundation work. The process also produced five recommendations for foundations that seek a partnered approach to school change.

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In engaging in this work, the foundation, school, and university partners learned important lessons about the challenges of creating inclusive community change.

readiness, may be outside of the scope of the traditional K–12 foci but have critical implications for student performance. Cultural norms for achievement, on the other hand, may be so deeply entrenched in tradition that making headway might seem impossible. The quality of school leadership and curricular initiatives are closely linked to schools' strategic planning, which is directed by the school board and tethered to high-stakes accountability standards. Given these intense conditions, school leaders may not welcome foundations as yet another voice in decision-making.

As Easterling, Arnold, Jones, and Smart (2013) observe,

> Highly successful collaboratives — the ones that generate synergistic, community-wide impacts — do more than align the activities of members. They also find smarter, more comprehensive ways of addressing the issues that are at the root of whatever problem they are working to solve. (p. 108)

The goal of generating synergistic, community-wide impacts motivated The Alleghany Foundation to initiate a partnership organized around a broad but central question: How can it engage with the education community and fund a process of school improvement that is coherent, measurable, and sustainable? In engaging in this work, the foundation, school, and university partners learned important lessons about the challenges of creating inclusive community change. Some of these lessons are specific to the community, but many are more general and bring important perspectives to broader issues concerning philanthropy in small communities.

In this article, we describe an ongoing partnership and the seven steps taken as a result of this partnership. Then, we present three key observations that have broad implications for foundations striving for inclusive community change. We close with five recommendations for foundations striving toward a partnered approach to school improvement.

Context for the Work

The Alleghany Foundation is one of approximately 300 health conversion foundations in the U.S. (Niggel & Brandon, 2014), with assets of $60 million and disbursements of between $2 million and $5 million per year. Over the past three years, the foundation has invested between 25 percent and 50 percent of those funds toward education in the region. The consistent focus of the foundation's education committee has been to move the schools "from good to great" — to create a world-class education system in a small, rural area.

The Alleghany Highlands region has a population of 21,400 and is served by two school districts: Alleghany County Public Schools (ACPS), with about 2,000 students, and Covington City Public Schools (CCPS), with about 1,000 students. The districts' students are predominantly white (88 percent and 76 percent, respectively), but both enroll a significant number of African Americans (6 percent and 14 percent) and students from other ethnic groups. Roughly half of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, suggesting considerable poverty in the area. Student enrollment in ACPS declined 9 percent over the past four years, leading to significant funding and staffing challenges. Enrollment in CCPS is small, leading to limited course options for high school students. Both districts saw turnover in superintendents over the past several years (and during the course of this partnership).

It may be surprising that there are two separate districts serving a relatively small region, and prior to the start of the partnership there were intense debates about a merger. "There is a longstanding rivalry between the two school divisions," one of the superintendents observed.

While small, they are surprisingly typical of the nation's school districts and representative of rural districts. Of 13,768 U.S. school districts, ACPS is larger than the median and CCPS is only somewhat smaller (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

Twenty-four percent of U.S. students attend rural schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), and rural communities pose unique strengths and challenges that need to be considered in the context of school-improvement efforts. Rural areas have difficulty recruiting and retaining talented teachers (Miller, 2012) and obtaining professional development opportunities (Nugent et al., 2017). Small and shrinking enrollments have large impacts in school districts, which may contain only three to five schools and struggle to meet student needs. Evidence for what works in rural schools is sparse; most education research focuses on suburban and urban schools (Autio & Deussen, 2017).

But rural schools have important strengths. Rural areas often have close-knit communities — families and students know administrators and teachers outside of school, and schools can be a center for community life (American Youth Policy Forum, 2010). Existing "place attachment" in rural schools can improve instructional relevance by leveraging students' immediate community activities into instruction (Biddle & Azano, 2016).

In 2014, The Alleghany Foundation initiated efforts to engage with schools by gathering and listening to teachers from both districts. An education consultant to the foundation, who is also a member of the community, interviewed teachers to learn more about what they saw as opportunities to help move their classrooms "from good to great." She then gathered a small group of teachers from both districts to identify programs for professional development that would help address the needs they identified. A few possible programs surfaced, and learning trips to investigate them involved teachers, principals, school board members, superintendents, members of the foundation's education committee, and other participants. One such program, the *Responsive*

> *There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to school improvement. As a result, it is essential to engage people at all levels of an education system to create change in that system.*

Classroom® approach, led the foundation to the University of Virginia (UVA) to meet Sara E. Rimm-Kaufman, who had just completed a large, randomized, controlled trial of the approach (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014). The ensuing conversation exposed a challenging reality: There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to school improvement. As a result, it is essential to engage people at all levels of an education system to create change in that system.

Rimm-Kaufman was seeking new opportunities to translate research to practice in schools. UVA is a large state university located 110 miles east of the Alleghany Highlands. U.S. Department of Education training grants available at UVA opened up possibilities to engage students and postdoctoral fellows in the partnership work without any additional cost.

The initial conversation among the foundation, school district, and university partners occurred at a particular moment when the education research field was showing new interest in public scholarship involving two elements: translation and engagement. Translation involves effective and accessible communication of research findings to stakeholders who need this information; engagement involves research that is done in partnership with stakeholders to solve pressing, tangible problems (Oakes, 2018). Also during this period, the pendulum in education research was swinging away from a narrow model focused on establishing evidence on whether programs can work, and toward a broader view that examines how to make programs work reliably and across diverse contexts (Bryk, 2015).

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FIGURE 1 Theory of Change for the Alleghany Highlands-UVA Collaborative Project
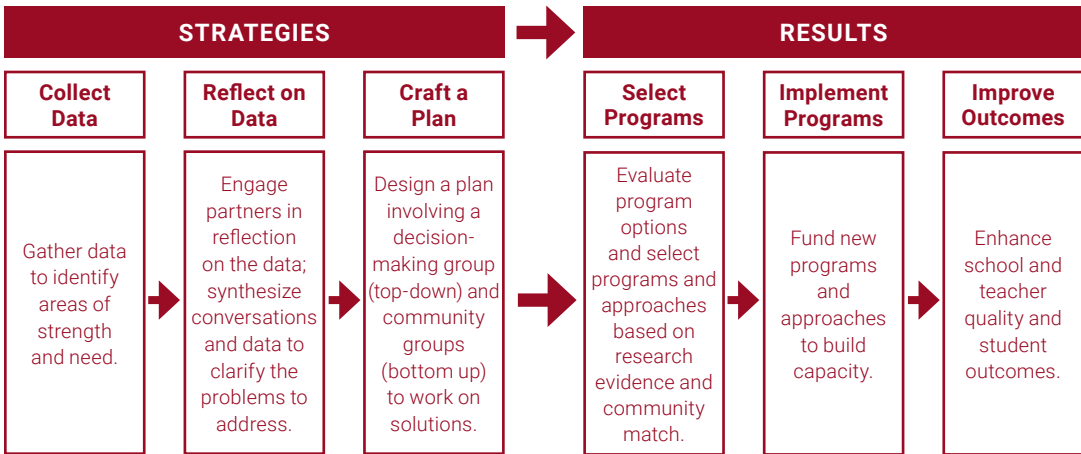
Related to these shifts, research-practice partnerships (RPPs) have emerged as a mechanism for bridging the gap between what we know works in education and what policies and practices are actually implemented in schools (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). Research-practice partnerships involve a variety of stakeholders (e.g., researchers, district leaders) focused on problems of education practice for an extended period of time. The work is designed around mutual goals and involves the analysis of local data (Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013) to identify challenges and guide recommendations.

This initial learning visit and the follow-up conversations with the school districts led to the creation of the Alleghany Highlands-University of Virginia Collaborative Project, by which the district, foundation, and university partners initiated a partnered process of school change. This RPP's theory of change envisioned:

1. gathering data to identify areas of strength and need;

2. engaging partners in reflection on the data, synthesizing data, and discussions to clarify the problems to address;

3. crafting a plan for change;

4. evaluating program options and select programs based on ideas emerging from community members, the districts' strategic plans, and evidence of effectiveness; and

5. funding of new programs and approaches, which would lead to

6. improved school quality and student outcomes. (See Figure 1.)

Seven Steps in the Partnered Work of School Change

Our RPP began an effort to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and youth in the Alleghany Highlands. We established a series of steps, some of which emphasized the work of the university and others that accentuated the role of the foundation and districts. The process that ensued was iterative. For instance, we conducted one broad and unfocused data-collection effort and discussed the meaning of the data, then conducted a more focused set of surveys to identify problems to solve. The work was dynamic as well: At times, the district partners led and the foundation and university partners accommodated their interests; at other times, the foundation or the university led and the other partners followed. Individuals entered and exited the process throughout. Both superintendents assumed their roles after the project was

underway. As with any community project, some participants stayed engaged in the work throughout and others joined or left at various points. Despite these dynamics, systematic steps were taken to achieve our goals.

The first step involved communication, developing trust, establishing the partnership, and a small financial commitment to the UVA team to engage in partnered research. The university team met with district stakeholders and the foundation, and learned about the economic and historical contexts for school change. The foundation brought the partnership opportunity to both school boards for their approval. The university team received a small grant from the foundation, and the school and university partners established memoranda of agreement to set the stage for data-collection efforts.

The second step was a data-based scan to identify needs and select surveys to assess the lived experiences in schools. Districts are awash in data, but most of the indicators (e.g., state math and reading achievement scores) give few insights into the root causes of problems. This step was guided by a broad question: What information do we need to understand and improve schools in this region? The university team was from outside of the community and therefore brought an independent perspective; they were tasked with initial data collection. The team conducted initial brief interviews and surveys with 70 people in the community, including administrators, teachers, students, recent district graduates, parents of children with special needs, and families with young and school-age children. In this step, we strived to cover a broad area. The objective was to identify points of tension, opportunities, and areas of need to inform a more focused and systematic data-collection effort in our next step.

The research team synthesized the information and shared the findings with superintendents and the foundation education board. The group assessed the meaning of the findings and discussed what to focus on and measure in next steps. A few themes emerged, including parent involvement in schools, teachers' feelings of effectiveness, the cultural norms for achievement

A few themes emerged, including parent involvement in schools, teachers' feelings of effectiveness, the cultural norms for achievement in the schools, program coherence and commitment to programs, and students' perception of engagement in learning.

in the schools, program coherence and commitment to programs, and students' perception of engagement in learning. Next, the university partners identified well-validated survey measures based on emergent themes and consulted the school superintendents to make the final selection. The surveys selected had been developed by education research organizations, including the Institute for Research and Reform in Education, the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, Panorama Education, and various others (e.g., Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, n.d.). Such surveys were ideal for tapping into the lived experience in schools from the point of view of administrators, teachers, other school personnel, students, and families.

The next step involved surveying education stakeholders to get a data-based perspective of their needs. In essence, we used data-collection efforts as a way of listening to the voices of many people in the community. We asked teachers if they believed that administrators, teachers, and parents shared a common vision of student success. Students responded to surveys about whether they tried hard in school and sensed that their teachers expected them to do their best work. Families answered questions about whether their child's school was welcoming and if they felt sure about how to communicate with teachers, administrators, and staff.

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Surveys were completed by 38 administrators and nonteaching personnel, 233 teachers, and 2,135 students in grades 3 through 12. Response rates were high, representing more than 78 percent of educators and 87 percent of students in the two districts. The research team and the districts reached out to families via email, paper survey options were offered at the schools, and ads were run in local newspapers. Despite those efforts, only 133 families responded — a response rate of roughly 10 percent. Each district also shared data from other sources, including Virginia Department of Education achievement figures and information from a statewide Youth Risk and Behavior Survey.

The fourth step involved data analysis and synthesis. The university team analyzed the data and identified strengths upon which to build and areas in need of growth. For example, the surveys showed that teachers in both districts felt effective in their instruction. More than 80 percent of teachers reported they could craft good questions for their students, use a variety of assessment strategies, and engage in other instructional strategies that indicated high quality. The students themselves generally reported a high level of engagement in learning (ranging from 96 percent of third- to fifth-graders to 73 percent of high schoolers), stating that they tried hard in school, paid attention in class, and worked very hard on their studies. These were strengths to leverage in next steps.

As areas in need of growth, teachers in both districts thought their schools had difficulty creating and sustaining a coherent vision of successful student outcomes; only half believed that administrators, teachers, and parents shared a common vision of school success. And less than one-third of the teachers reported that programs and initiatives were given the time and support necessary to be successful; administrators and nonteaching personnel also expressed the need for focus on this area. This result was not surprising in light of recent turnover in district leadership and the prevalence of this challenge nationally. Yet it was an important warning, given the temptation of organizations to shift course instead of focusing on a set of long-term goals and the sustained work necessary to reach them.

The fifth step involved engaging district leaders and community members in a process of reflection on the data, with the goal of honing in on key community problems. The results were shared with the superintendents and the foundation's education committee. The group considered whether the data made sense (or not), matched what they expected, or gave them new information. Many of the findings confirmed what the district leaders knew, gave those intuitions greater credibility, and created a sense of urgency for change. As one community member remarked, "We didn't experience shock. We felt confirmation."

One set of results signaled challenges related to engaging families with their children's schools. Educators expressed doubts about the extent to which parents held high standards for their children's achievement and pressed for better school performance. Although the majority of educators felt they were reaching out to parents to develop common goals and strengthen student learning, fewer than 15 percent of educators reported that parents supported teachers' efforts, did their best to help their children learn, and attended parent-teacher conferences when requested. Almost half (43 percent) of teachers reported a negative relationship between schools and families. Family surveys revealed negativity in both directions: Almost half of the families who responded said that schools provided too little information on how to be involved in their child's schooling and that it posed a barrier to involvement. These findings showed the various ways that schools and families were disconnected from one another despite the small size of the Alleghany Highlands community, and shed light on how to improve those relationships.

Qualitative data suggested that there are "hard to reach" families in both districts, and it is difficult to make headway on student achievement without family engagement. Despite the newspaper ads, emails, at-school survey options, and other strategies to obtain input from families, the response rate to the survey was quite low.

While district leaders implied that some families are simply too busy to reply to such inquiries, the low response rate also reflected a mix of mistrust, disinterest, and lack of engagement with schools among families in the two districts.

In step six, the university team organized the information drawn from the data and the rich responses from the schools' leadership and foundation education committee to create a set of recommendations for action. The team sought advice from an administrator outside of the community because it believed an independent and objective view was important in crafting effective guidelines. The first, overarching recommendation was to build support for improvements by launching a community-based effort to outline a vision and goals for student learning; one step toward that effort was to create an education oversight committee made up of district administrators and of foundation representatives, who would prioritize funding decisions.

Another recommendation suggested establishing five community-based work groups, each corresponding to an area in need of development: 1) a culture of adult collaboration in schools, 2) a culture that values academic achievement and respect, 3) better early childhood experiences to boost school readiness, 4) engagement of families as partners in children's learning, and 5) the quality of instruction, especially related to reading. Each work group was tasked to use the UVA report to review data; identify two or three goals and metrics of progress toward those goals; identify potential programs to implement; bring in outside experts to speak, or take learning trips; and present ideas for programs to the oversight committee for implementation by district leaders and the foundation. Based on these recommendations, the foundation would consider funding these new programs. Each work group was designed to gather between six and 10 people every month and included parents, teachers, school leaders, community members, and others concerned about education.

The university partners also conducted a systematic review of the evidence base for programs and practices that could be adopted to address

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present challenges (i.e., low norms for achievement, disconnect between families and school). This process involved identifying programs, reviewing research on those programs, and evaluating that research. Here, there were important nuances to address. Most education research has been conducted in suburban and urban areas, raising questions about the extent to which it is applicable to rural communities. The university partners not only considered the quality and quantity of research on various programs, but also examined the extent to which programs had been researched in communities similar to the Alleghany Highlands. Information about these programs were provided to the work groups as examples of possibilities to consider.

The seventh step involved communicating recommendations for action and initiating the implementation of a partnered approach to school change. The school superintendents and foundation played a key role here; the university partners assumed a background role. The foundation's education consultant worked with the district administrators to jump-start the work by creating Education First, a community group of school supporters, and by creating the five work groups.

Progress, Challenges, and Next Steps

Now, after more than two years of work, we see many signs of progress. Education First holds annual summits and the ongoing meetings of community members and educators have created

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a consistent, communitywide conversation about education. The close social connection among people in the community has always been one of its strengths. Now, we see intentional leveraging of these connections to build capacity among educators and offer social capital to youth. Teachers in both districts receive professional development training together, and many gather for monthly dinners to talk about practices they use to support students. Teachers and principals in both districts are discussing the adoption of new social and emotional learning models that fit well with the *Responsive Classroom* approach and provide sustained support for these skills from preschool through grade 12. Local businesses have begun to develop internships for high school students. Adults who have not been engaged in making decisions about education have been brought into conversations, adding new ideas and skill sets. And by mixing educators from the two districts in these work groups, they "found out that we are more alike than we are different," said one superintendent (Snead-Johnson).

Some work groups have made dramatic gains: The early childhood group, for example, has launched fully. From the start, the group identified the goal of full enrollment in existing early childhood programs. It brought together preschool and kindergarten teachers to talk about

expectations for kindergarten readiness, which is considered a high-intensity, high-quality practice for improving the transition to school (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). The group organized training using The Incredible Years[1] series, and elderly adults in the community have been trained in parenting practices to be able to assist parents of young children with the greatest needs. The group is considering adopting a new preschool program, Elevate Early Education,[2] to increase access to affordable and high-quality preschool opportunities in the area. The early childhood group has tapped into Dolly Parton's Imagination Library,[3] a program supported by the Dollywood Foundation that sends books every month to children ages birth through 5. The work group also initiated a program called Rock and Read: At an infant's first pediatrician visit, each family receives a book, a toy, and information about developmental benchmarks that includes community resources for those whose children do not reach those benchmarks. These activities represent an important first step toward change, and the payoff in terms of school readiness could be realized within two to three years.

In the beginning, the partnership faced some daunting challenges. With new superintendents arriving at both districts, we found that the work groups were most productive in spaces outside of the scope of traditional K–12 efforts and on projects that school leaders could incorporate easily into their district's vision. The early childhood group was able to move relatively quickly because it was coordinating among the various early childhood services in the community, which operated separately from the school districts. The work on fostering a more respectful culture through the *Responsive Classroom* approach was successful because professional development in this approach added to the schools' efforts but did not require them to stop engaging in other activity.

After more than two years into the RPP, the next steps in engagement between the districts and

[1] See http://www.incredibleyears.com.
[2] See http://www.e3va.org.
[3] See https://imaginationlibrary.com/usa.

the foundation are taking shape. The original partnership between UVA, the foundation, and the school districts grew to include new initiatives. There are shifts among the partners in the balance of power and contribution, setting the tone for new projects to enter the scene using the partnership as a base from which to grow. Two examples stand out. First, both districts are incorporating a new effort to improve reading instruction in K-3 schools by working with a new UVA partner — one not part of the original collaboration — on a yearlong professional development effort. The work stemmed from the efforts by the work groups focused on improving instructional quality, and is being initiated and supported in a way that ensures high-quality implementation. (See Appendix.) Second, the district leaders and the foundation are moving to create a centralized oversight committee, a step that was meant to occur in year one but has taken somewhat longer. The committee will receive regular reports from each of the five work groups and consider their proposals for funding and implementation, and its centralized nature will create opportunities for each district to compare proposals with its strategic vision and either adopt or reject the new initiatives. The next much-needed step will involve evaluation of progress using many of the same measures used to identify needs and strengths.

Key Observations

The work of the Alleghany Highlands-UVA Collaborative Project produced several important lessons about the challenges of creating inclusive community change: the ways in which school-improvement work in rural communities might be approached by foundations, how outcomes can be meaningfully measured, and what best motivates a community's commitment to change.

Foundations Can Have Real Impact in Rural Communities

Many decisions about programs and practices are determined at the local level, which opens up unique opportunities for foundations to work with rural schools to improve child and youth outcomes. As Dianne Garcia, The Alleghany Foundation's education consultant, notes,

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The Alleghany Highlands has seen a decrease of economic development and an increase of people moving out of the area to find work. Our tax base has decreased, leaving school budgets tight. Many school employees are taking on extra responsibilities and duties. This decreases opportunities for educators to try new models or go to conferences or professional development institutes.

Despite these challenges, we have seen tremendous progress because of the willingness of the foundation to fully engage with the school districts and the community in the process of systematic school improvement. As Alleghany Foundation Executive Director Mary Fant Donnan observes,

Foundations look at the work with different questions, and have the luxury that a school board might not have when having to work through operational budgets and many different mandates. Questions around a foundation boardroom table tend to be along the lines of, "What about this change will make this system better? By how much? Why? How will we know?" That leads to a different conversation from many traditional ones [that] school board members have on their agendas when many state programs are based on budgets and timelines and often siloed data sets.

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in a rural area is to listen carefully to the challenges present and identify ways that they can be viewed as strengths. For example, the CCPS central office has a small staff and the superintendent herself has a list of 11 job responsibilities, ranging from chief academic officer and director of special education to truancy officer. At first glance, the CCPS staffing issue may be perceived as a disadvantage. But it also means that all those roles can be more easily aligned with new goals in the presence of effective supports from the foundation. In another example, ACPS Superintendent Eugene Kotulka spoke of the challenge of providing the district's children "with the same opportunities that students in wealthier and more suburban school districts provide their children. Our students are more at risk due to the lack of adequate funding — salaries, equipment, [fewer] classes for students to choose." The concern raised by ACPS is an important one. Given the relatively small student body, a wisely placed influx of foundation funds and support can raise opportunities for all students in a district, not just a select few.

Foundation engagement with rural communities supports equity in education. Federal and state policies are often geared to meet urban and suburban school issues, and rural areas tend to receive less philanthropic giving than suburban or urban locales (Ashley, 2012; Norris-Tirrell, Blessett, & Knox, 2014). Despite a history of sidelining rural school considerations (Biddle &

Azano, 2016), there are new opportunities available for foundations to take action. Smart (2018) calls attention to almost 100 health conversion foundations located in the South, with $8 billion in assets and federal mandates to serve rural communities. Further, he points out,

> Like too many of their peers across the philanthropic spectrum, they hesitate to invest deeply in the kind of on-the-ground advocacy, difficult conversations, and paradigm shifts that are necessary to dismantle systems and structures that perpetuate inequity and poverty in the region.

Inclusive community change for children and youth is exactly the kind of deep investment needed to address systemic inequity.

Measure Proximal as Well as Distal Outcomes

Too often, school districts make decisions based on the accountability data they have on hand — achievement data, graduation rates, and other indicators. Although important, these data reveal little about the factors that produce these outcomes. To get at the root cause of problems, it is essential to measure the lived experience in schools — this will help in understanding student engagement, the culture of achievement, family-school relationships, and other elements of success. For example, if students do not perceive their peers as valuing academics or do not feel that their teacher communicates high expectations, they are less likely to perform well (Hamm, Farmer, Lambert, & Gravelle, 2014; Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborne, & Sibley, 2016).

Differentiate between distal and proximal outcomes, and measure both. Distal outcomes, such as achievement and graduation rate, represent long-term targets. Proximal outcomes, such as student engagement, are near-term, process indicators of progress. Various organizations are prepared to gather data on proximal outcomes: the Institute for Research and Reform in Education and Panorama Education, for example, offer data-based services to understand school culture. Some districts have ongoing RPPs, with ample data to be used for these purposes available from the University of Chicago Consortium for School Research and other

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sources. University partners can enter into RPPs such as the Alleghany Highlands-UVA Collaborative Project. State data that measure school climate, such as the Virginia Youth Risk and Behavior Survey, may be available as raw material for reflection and improvement.

School Improvement Efforts Take Time

It can take three to five years for new programs to take hold in schools. But districts often struggle to sustain efforts, with schools sometimes adopting a new initiative for one to two years and then shifting to yet another new program. Foundations can play a pivotal role in intentional school reform by sustaining and deepening practice of evidence-based programs that work in their local schools.

Our partnership clarified the importance of identifying a vision and following through with that vision for many years. Now, as new programs are introduced and embedded into the community, the foundation and schools strive to gather information on early signs of progress. If the schools signal that a program appears to be promising, the foundation seeks ways to sustain and deepen work related to that program, as opposed to simply adding programs in a fragmented way.

The superintendent of one district (Snead-Johnson) observed that it "is steeped in tradition, and change is very hard. We have a very challenging time making change." Foundations can become consistent, reliable partners in comprehensive approaches to improve outcomes for students.

Balance Engaging School Leaders With Community-Based Efforts

School improvement is a process of human change that involves shifts in direction by school leadership, changes in daily practices among teachers, and different ways of working for all stakeholders (Evans, 1996). As a result, change will occur only if people are truly motivated and have a vision of what is possible as a consequence of their efforts (Fullan, 2006). School improvement requires the presence of both "top down" and "bottom up" efforts in the community and

> *Foundations can play a pivotal role in intentional school reform by sustaining and deepening practice of evidence-based programs that work in their local schools.*

the schools. And as one superintendent (Kotulka) emphasized, "Staff members need to be part of the vision for change to make it sustainable."

Herein lies the challenge. Although it is true that efforts to change an education system gain momentum only with a high level of community input and engagement — that is, a bottom-up approach, it is equally important that school officials lead in ways that match their strategic plans and meet local needs of their schools — that is, a top-down approach. One challenge in our partnership has been coordinating and connecting the school leadership and community work groups.

One superintendent (Snead-Johnson) describes the complexity of inclusive community change involving numerous stakeholders:

> Each school district has different strategic goals due to state, federal, or school board expectations, and that sometimes causes differing opinions at the table. The Alleghany Foundation has expectations from its board members and community partners that do not always jibe with the school districts' needs. Lay people often do not have a sense that a school division has unique challenges that cannot be changed to make it run 100 percent totally as a company or a nonprofit organization.

Despite these challenges, the pursuit is worthwhile. Foundations can opt for a range of approaches that can be viewed as a continuum of engagement. The narrowest and most straightforward method is to simply offer funds for special programs, which essentially add to what schools are already doing. A somewhat more complicated approach is to identify school

The most complex approach is for foundations to fully engage with local schools in a way that supports the schools' vision. This complex approach takes the long view and strives toward systemic changes. In doing so, foundations need to fully embrace the notion that improving student outcomes is multifaceted, dynamic and requires changes to different contexts (e.g., child care, schools) within a community.

needs and selectively fund teachers' professional development on topics of interest to the foundation and school districts. The most complex approach is for foundations to fully engage with local schools in a way that supports the schools' vision. This complex approach takes the long view and strives toward systemic changes. In doing so, foundations need to fully embrace the notion that improving student outcomes is multifaceted, dynamic and requires changes to different contexts (e.g., child care, schools) within a community.

The more complex approach is most consistent with the aspirations of collective impact, which entail committed work by a group of stakeholders, focused on a common agenda, toward solutions to a specific social problem (Kania & Kramer, 2011), and it holds the greatest potential for substantial, long-lasting change. The Alleghany Foundation has been an ambitious funder, eager to transition from a narrow approach toward supporting schools to a fully embedded and engaged strategy for creating

school improvement. Although challenging, this approach holds the greatest promise for sustained school improvement.

Five Recommendations

We offer five recommendations based on lessons learned from the Alleghany Highlands-University of Virginia Collaborative Project:

1. Use data as a way of listening. Gather data about the lived experience in schools from many different stakeholders — including children, youth, and families — to address root causes. Be sure to seek input from members of traditionally marginalized groups (e.g., families of children with special needs, students of color). Establish regular intervals for gathering and reflecting on data. Share results from the data to initiate conversations designed to identify problems and plan future action.

2. Develop a stable, long-term, mutually beneficial partnership with a partner from outside the community. Balance input from inside and outside: Input from the community will engender motivation for improvement, while unbiased data collection, objective narration of the school-change process, and identification of new resources and programs can best come from outside sources. As one of the superintendents (Snead-Johnson) noted, "Working with the UVA partners has brought a different perspective to the table that makes it easier to have access to opportunities that did not exist in the past."

3. Identify and fund new initiatives that both emanate from community members and fit with the district's strategic plan. Programs do not work if they are not implemented well, and buy-in from both community and school leadership are essential to their success.

4. Choose just a few new initiatives at one time, and focus on their successful implementation. For each, discuss what the initiative is expected to accomplish, consider implementation carefully, and evaluate

progress as the work continues. If new initiatives do not work, pay attention to why they failed. Did they miss the mark, or was the problem one of implementation? If they do work, deepen those practices to support sustainability rather than moving on quickly to new efforts.

5. Be patient. School improvement is a slow process. Stay keenly aware that school change is a continuous and iterative, and requires actions followed by reflection on those actions (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015).

Closing Comments

The key challenge foundations will face as they work to support schools is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for improving education. As Donnan, the foundation's executive director, cautioned,

> A plan for action in education is not as prescribed as one might think or maybe even hope for. Part of the progress has been organizing ourselves and using working groups to dig deeper into the data and to consider existing programs, best practices, and how they might apply here. The working groups talk about the culture we have versus the culture we are trying to create. It is important to see this iterative process as a critical improvement itself.

Successful school improvement demands a change in culture. Tracking school change requires attention to process and product. Though demanding, inclusive community change can work to identify and redress the root causes of problems.

Authors' Notes

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APPENDIX Project Description for Move AHEAD

An important reflection on the Alleghany Highlands-University of Virginia (UVA) Collaborative Project is the extent to which the partnership is both dynamic and sustaining. One way that the partnership sustains and grows is that it leads to new collaborations. Those collaborations, even when working independently in an operational sense, retain the values of the original partnership.

For example, one recommendation stemming from the 2016 data synthesis and discussions was to enhance the quality of instruction in key academic content areas, starting with English language arts. The work group that focused on this effort included school leaders, teachers, and community members in both districts. The members began to meet regularly and consider programs to bring to the community and, as part of that discussion, asked the university partners for guidance on what next steps to take. From that initial request, they invited a colleague, Anita McGinty, to the conversation. McGinty is director of a statewide literacy initiative, Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), and was in a unique position to provide support on this issue.

After discussion, it became clear that the districts had recently invested significant money into new curriculum programs but were concerned that these were not having the hoped-for impact. At the same time, the PALS office at UVA had been studying how best to understand the ways districts were using diagnostic assessment information, in conjunction with curricular resources, for data-based instructional decision-making. A new opportunity became apparent. Alleghany County Public Schools and Covington City Public Schools were looking for support for their teacher on literacy development. The PALS group viewed it as an opportunity to learn from these teachers and, ultimately, build usable, feasible models of professional development that could be scaled up. District leaders were eager to engage.

PALS organized a retreat for the districts' superintendents, principals, K–2 teachers, and reading-committee members that focused on reading and provided opportunities for conversations among teachers. Meanwhile, the districts articulated their short- and long-term needs to the PALS team, who created six modules geared to support teachers with the ultimate goal of using the modules statewide: 1) getting to know your class, 2) forming instructional groups, 3) planning for small-group instruction, 4) reflecting on mid-year data, 5) spelling and word study, and 6) using spring data to plan for transition. Although it is too soon to evaluate, the uptake and teacher learning appears promising.

The Move AHEAD (Alleghany Highlands Engaging in Analyzing Data) in Literacy project is ongoing, and the two-way communication within the partnership is seen on both the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, the six professional learning opportunities that are organized across the year always involve a communication from the UVA team to the schools' leadership and teachers, as well as new content for the teachers and support for their engaging in that content as grade-level teams. Each professional learning opportunity also involves a reflection by the participants, which is sent back to the UVA team; a chance for a call for feedback or questions; and a follow-up coaching message and "lessons learned" sheet that helps communicate what the UVA team noticed and learned from that experience. Also at a macro level is a balance between those visits to the schools that are organized for observational data collection and those that are true listening sessions designed to help the UVA team understand the benefits and challenges that the participants see. The timing between each learning experience allows the UVA team to adjust content or format according to feedback, and has twice already resulted in major shifts in content and design: creating separate content for kindergarten and for first and second grades and a decision to illustrate how existing programs can be adapted when certain content may be missing, as opposed to suggesting new instructional approaches as a supplement to those programs.

At the micro level, a two-way partnership is evident in the title of the project, which was co-developed and included the name of the region. This modification helped teachers and school leaders elicit more connection and support when speaking about the project to the community. In another example, remote coaching sessions were poorly attended because the teachers were culturally resistant to phone interviews or Skype calls, even though the timing of these calls was specifically set based on a poll of the teachers. As a result, in-person feedback sessions were organized for the first semester, and in the second semester a different approach to the technology will be attempted.

An End to Business as Usual: Nurturing Authentic Partnerships to Create Lasting Community Change

Jeffrey Sunshine, Ph.D., and Bernadette Sangalang, Ph.D., David and Lucile Packard Foundation

Introduction

Foundations often invest in complex, multisite community change efforts with many moving parts, and progress is typically achieved in a nonlinear fashion. Over the years the roles of foundations investing in community change efforts have evolved, with many serving more as partners with communities and less as the distant goal setters and check writers (Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, Buck, & Dewar, 2011). Here we share our reflections as Children, Families, and Communities (CFC) program officers at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, managing Starting Smart and Strong, a 10-year place-based commitment to early learning in three California communities.

Three years into strategy implementation, we offer key insights into how and why we engage differently with our grantees from the way we have done so in the past. We describe shifts in our mindsets and commitments that challenge traditional foundation orthodoxies that we believe are essential for effectively supporting our grantees and catalyzing inclusive community change. We close with what we are learning along the way as we set out on a path to better understand what it takes to foster genuine partnerships with communities, as well as the importance of co-creating strategies with grantees to sustain lasting change.

Our Commitment to Children

Since the creation of the Packard Foundation over 50 years ago, the Packard family has remained committed to improving the lives of children. To that end, the foundation has

Key Points

- The David and Lucile Packard Foundation created Starting Smart and Strong, a 10-year place-based initiative in three California communities, to develop and test solutions that support parents, caregivers, and educators as they prepare young children to be healthy and ready for school. The initiative brings together public and private partners to create comprehensive early-learning systems and ultimately scale what works.

- This article offers key insights into the foundation's experience, three years into implementation, with managing this complex initiative and how program officers were compelled to think differently about the best roles staff can play to support grantee communities and amplify constituent voice. Shifts in mindsets and commitments that challenge traditional foundation orthodoxies were essential for effectively supporting inclusive community change.

- Program officers also had to develop new capacities that both focus on the development of systems that are locally designed and driven and work in service of the foundation's broader strategy goals. This juxtaposition has upended business as usual and set the foundation on a path that seeks to better understand authentic partnership with communities and the importance of co-creating strategies to sustain lasting change.

The foundation understands that changes to the underlying systems needed to address complex issues can sometimes take years. As a result, its program strategies often have long time horizons, which take into account changes in political, social, and community contexts that can either impede or accelerate change.

supported strategies that allow young children to reach their full potential by focusing on two critical aspects of their development: learning and health. Within these domains, the foundation has funded research, direct service programs, and systems-improvement efforts in a range of areas, including quality child care, preschool and transitional kindergarten programs, and parent education.

A combination of research and contextual factors have informed the foundation's development of its current Early Learning strategy. Brain science has offered increasing evidence of the rapid rate of brain development in a child's youngest years that calls for creating a set of quality learning experiences from birth through age 8 to lay the foundation for later success (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007). Moreover, most children face several important transitions during their first eight years of life. Their first is very likely from home care to child care, then off to preschool, followed by transitional kindergarten or kindergarten, and finally into elementary grades. Consistency in approaches across settings can support children's development and learning, and later success in school.

Evidence shows that quality interactions between children and parents, caregivers, and teachers who facilitate learning and development can have a profound impact on child outcomes. When children do not get what they need from adults to learn and thrive, especially in the early years, the gaps are often insurmountable later on. More and more researchers and early learning and education leaders have recommended that the adults who interact the most with children during these critical years be equipped with the skills and resources they need to help children thrive (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016). So, the question becomes how to set up systems of support across sectors and settings that provide adults with the resources, strategies, and tools they need to support a child's optimal learning and development. The Packard Foundation's long history of tackling complex issues fueled our commitment to addressing this question.

Starting Smart and Strong

The foundation understands that changes to the underlying systems needed to address complex issues can sometimes take years. As a result, its program strategies often have long time horizons, which take into account changes in political, social, and community contexts that can either impede or accelerate change. At the highest level, foundation trustees approve all programmatic strategies, while their design and implementation are developed and managed at the program level.

In 2013, trustees approved CFC's Early Learning strategy, the goal of which is to improve the quality of early learning and developmental experiences in both formal and informal settings for California children, birth through age 5, by supporting parents, caregivers, and educators. Upon strategy approval, CFC launched Starting Smart and Strong, a community-driven commitment to ensure that every young child living in the communities of Fresno, Oakland, and San Jose grows up healthy and ready for kindergarten. Each of the communities brings together public and private supporters, including service providers, school district staff, community members, advocates, and funders, to create

comprehensive local early learning ecosystems, to test and develop solutions, and take collective action to create lasting community change.

Starting Smart and Strong focuses on four pillars of work: testing and scaling approaches to professional development and training for caregivers and educators; resources and support for parents, families, friends, neighbors, and other informal caregivers; access to quality health care and developmental screenings for all children in the community; and creating strong and durable early-learning systems and a plan to scale what works (David and Lucile Packard Foundation, 2017). In addition to the three Starting Smart and Strong communities, other grantee partners supporting this place-based effort include evaluation, communications, innovation and scaling partners, and technical assistance providers.

Why a Place-Based Strategy?

Because Starting Smart and Strong relies heavily on changing parent, caregiver, and teacher practice over time, it made sense to us that its focus had to be on where children and families are served, which is in communities. A place-based approach offers several distinct advantages: first, it is an opportunity to engage with local systems leaders, such as school district and county office of education administrators, social service providers, and medical providers, who can work collaboratively over time to create cohesive early-learning ecosystems appropriate to their unique contexts. Second, working in communities provides opportunities to test new approaches and learn what can be scaled through local systems if they prove to be effective. Third, a well-coordinated ecosystem can help create a continuum of learning for children that accommodates their transitions from one program and system to another as they grow older. Finally, working deeply in communities creates an opportunity to amplify local policy wins that serve as proof points, connecting them to larger state policy goals.

Shifting Our Roles to Support a Place-Based Approach

For program officers, what does it mean to work within a place-based context? Because

Because place-based community change efforts have long been part of funders' toolkits but have produced mixed results, we were quite careful as we approached our work with Starting Smart and Strong.

place-based community change efforts have long been part of funders' toolkits but have produced mixed results (Kubisch et al., 2011), we were quite careful as we approached our work with Starting Smart and Strong. In the CFC program, we see ourselves as engaged grantmakers, which has come to mean staying in close touch with grantees and their partners, listening purposefully, having ongoing strategy conversations, conducting frequent site visits, and, over time, forming solid, collaborative relationships. Through this approach to grantee and partner engagement, we feel quite involved and rooted in community. We contrast this to foundations who are "black box" grantmakers, an orientation to community change that is focused more on the goals and outcomes of grants than on ongoing engagement with grantees.

However, our lived experience through Starting Smart and Strong has taught us that working this way is far more personal, upfront, and immediate than we had ever imagined. We quickly learned that if we wanted a shot at becoming true collaborators in a community's transformative change, we would have to think and feel differently about how best to deepen our relationships with grantees and the community at large and amplify their voices. To effectively support inclusive community change, we have needed to challenge traditional foundation orthodoxy — particularly when it comes to the multiple roles we play in place-based work.

For example, as the work has matured we have been brought into deeper community

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conversations, and have found ourselves toggling among the roles of thought partner, confidante, and funder. The complexity of holding multiple roles simultaneously has forced us to become much more mindful of the delicate nature of boundaries and perceived power dynamics, and how they can shift over time. At times, it can be important to notice and recognize these dynamics and address them directly in real time. At other times, it can be equally important to notice and recognize them but, given the delicacy of a conversation, choose to reflect on their impact and address them at a later date, if at all. Below we describe the new and challenging ways in which we are approaching different dimensions of strategy implementation.

Who Owns the Strategy?

While the ultimate impact of achieving kindergarten readiness at scale was a foundation priority, we entered this work knowing that communities needed to believe in this outcome and embrace the goals that would help them achieve it. That means, as program officers, we have had to be in ongoing, open, and honest dialogue with grantees, educators, parents, and other community members, listening intently, pushing at times, being pushed at other times, but remaining clear that we wanted our communities to take the lead while offering the support structures that enabled them to do so.

This dynamic, while awkward at first, became easier over time. We also recognized when it was important to clarify our own expectations to provide direction for the work. For example, each community developed a different approach to systems change that closely aligned with its unique context. We provided resources, guidance, and support that complemented each community's approach, but ultimately our role was to learn alongside our grantees and support them as change agents. Our aim was to remain engaged with collective agreement about the ultimate goal and impact we sought to achieve, lay the foundation for co-creating solutions, and not prescribe solutions. As mentioned earlier, there is an inherent power dynamic that exists between funder and grantee (Guinee & Knight, 2013). However, through this real-time engagement and transparency about our role, we are learning, assessing, and adapting our strategy in partnership with our grantees. At times it has caused us to step back and ask ourselves the question, "Whose strategy is it anyway — yours, mine, or ours?"

Our experiences in the first three years of Starting Smart and Strong have taught us that a high level of engagement with communities is necessary if our goal is to cultivate meaningful relationships that make funder-grantee co-creation and co-learning possible and productive. And we are starting to see the outcomes of working this way. One community recently told us that in the past they always looked to us to tell them what to do, and now, three years later, they are leading the work and no longer solely rely on us for guidance.

A "Backbone" Role Can Cause Confusion

Funder approaches to place-based community change efforts are wide-ranging. Some funders are heavily involved in every aspect of their grantees' work, while others invest in intermediaries to manage their place-based initiatives. Still others take a more hands-off approach and have very limited contact with grantees once grants are awarded (Stevenson, Bockstette, Seneviratne, Cain, & Foster, 2018). For us, we wanted to find a balance along this continuum and develop an approach that would be best

suited for the community change outcomes we were hoping to achieve. Because each Starting Smart and Strong community is unique, we knew our approach had to be both flexible, to account for wide variations in the work, and specific, to guide implementation efforts. We also knew that to create meaningful partnerships, we had to earn community trust through authentic communication.

As program officers, we often lament the fact that there is never enough time to do our jobs, but we know, too, that in that regard we are not unique. What surprised us is how much time and energy deep grantee engagement takes. As our community relationships have deepened and we have become more trusted as partners in the work, demands on our time have increased. We have found ourselves invited to many more after-hours meetings, engaging in weekend phone calls, and attending weekend trainings with grantees. Depending on the situation, we have been asked to be a voice for community change, act as a sounding board, assist with problem solving, or learn alongside our colleagues. Much of the time, we find ourselves playing a supportive role as our grantees create the conditions necessary for change in their communities. Given that we have other grantmaking responsibilities outside of Starting Smart and Strong, the complexity of these tasks spread over three communities can be daunting.

There are ways that we could have mitigated these complexities. For example, in many collaborative systems-change efforts, there is a backbone organization that is specifically dedicated to paying close attention to the needs of the work and serves several roles, among them coordinating the various dimensions and collaborators involved in an initiative, guiding vision and strategy, and supporting aligned activities (Crespin & Moser, 2018). We could have invested in an intermediary to serve as the backbone function for Starting Smart and Strong, but chose, instead, to play a backbone-type role ourselves. Because the work was new and uncharted for us, we were concerned that if we outsourced the role we would have created a certain distance from our partners and the work, and might have

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had the unintended effect of diluting what we were learning about gaining traction in communities and ultimately, achieving impact at scale.

By the very fact that we are a foundation playing a backbone-type role, we knew we would be entering communities with an inherent imbalance of power. We surfaced this dynamic early on in initial community conversations and used the metaphor of "holding tight and holding loose" to describe it. For instance, the ultimate goal or "north star" of Starting Smart and Strong is that children arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to learn. We hold that goal tight, meaning that it is nonnegotiable. However, communities decide how they are going to work toward achieving that goal, and we hold that loose.

But it can also be confusing because the balance of power can shift depending on the issue, and it calls for a level of deep negotiation that we had not anticipated. One such issue was around a data decision that the foundation made. It was important to us that each of the Starting Smart and Strong communities utilize a population-level measure so at the end of 10 years we would be able to talk about child outcomes across the communities. There was unanimous resistance about implementing a new measure

Looking back at the first three years of Starting Smart and Strong, we see evidence that our time has paid off in deepening relationships in our three communities, which is essential if we want to play a part in supporting lasting community change. Now we ask ourselves: Is the same level of deep grantee engagement essential for the next three to seven years of the strategy?

for a variety of reasons, which forced us to think long and hard about whether this was an important enough decision to hold tight; we decided that it was. It took almost a year of conversation with each of our communities, and together we decided that they would implement the data measure but would have maximum flexibility in developing plans for its rollout. Overall, conversations about power dynamics have become less charged than then they used to be, primarily because we have a built a shared commitment to working through issues by engaging in honest communication and negotiation.

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Staffing a Complex, Place-Based Initiative

When we chose to play a central role in Starting Smart and Strong, we had little idea what it

would actually mean for us to staff it. Our communities are not close to one another geographically, and we knew that we would need to be present in each of them a fair amount of the time, especially in the first few years. Knowing we were not able to hire additional foundation staff, we decided to embed a technical-assistance (TA) provider in each of the Starting Smart and Strong communities. The TA providers are consultants who know each community deeply and have credibility in key areas such as early learning, systems change, and cross-sector partnerships. As such, they offer a critical link between the foundation and the communities. Not only do they each have deep content expertise and local knowledge, but they also work collaboratively with one another and share learning across the communities.

Embedding a TA provider in each community added another level of complexity to our relationship building. Technical-assistance providers are not foundation staff per se, but over time we have come to see them as honest brokers who work side-by-side with our community partners and bring their voices into foundation-led conversations while consistently representing our voices and strategy on the ground.

Together we defined roles and responsibilities. But we found that in the early days of Starting Smart and Strong, the role itself was sometimes confusing to us, to them, and to community partners. What were the limits of their authority when, ultimately, we as program officers made final decisions and triggered funding? When and for what did community partners turn to us, and when did they turn to their TA providers? What did it mean to have confidential conversations? Working through issues, managing strong opinions, moving forward in a conversation one day and back several steps on another but staying committed, led to a level of respect that we never imagined. We are most proud of how dynamic and deeply meaningful these relationships have become to each of us.

As our relationships with our TA providers have deepened, we have been pushed to grow in our roles as program officers. Over the years, the

TA providers have challenged our assumptions, pushed the limits of our thinking, and deepened our connections to the communities by bridging us into new and important relationships. Importantly, they have helped extend our voices in the Starting Smart and Strong communities through their ability to translate our strategy into practice, while understanding both the latitude and guardrails that exist as intermediaries and proxy ambassadors of the foundation.

Building Trust and Time for Evaluation and Learning

Because Starting Smart and Strong is a complex, multisite, long-term community systems-change effort with a large investment, we knew we needed an evaluation approach to go along with it that prioritized learning and reflection, and that framing it correctly was essential. This means that instead of a traditional evaluation that looked at outcomes at discrete time points along the way, we chose a developmental evaluation approach that supported the developmental arc of the strategy, especially at its beginning, and that would generate the insights needed to adapt to the complexity of the work (Patton, 2010).

Developmental evaluation also required a deeper engagement from us, which once again had us reflecting on the nature of our relationship with our evaluators. While we were nurturing deeper partnerships with grantees, at the same time we were developing closer working relationships with our evaluators, which morphed into also engaging them as thought partners along the way. In developmental evaluation, strategy and evaluation feed each other — because we are often in communities, we tell evaluators what we are seeing on the ground and vice versa. Looking back, asking our evaluators to play a dual role was sometimes challenging. There were times when engaging them as thought partners could have impacted the integrity of the data by jeopardizing their objectivity, so they pulled back from thought partnership. And through building a deeper relationship with them we became better equipped to have those conversations with each other.

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Our evaluators also needed to build trusting relationships with the three communities and partners in order for deeper learning and reflection to occur. Because it is developmental evaluation, almost every pivot point in the evaluation requires engagement from both the foundation and our grantees, and that has been different from how we have operated in the past in our experience as CFC program officers. To be successful in this approach, we needed everyone involved in Starting Smart and Strong — at all levels, including foundation staff, grantees, educators and other constituents, and partners — to learn together along the way from insights and data and create feedback loops to support the emerging strategy. This required a commitment of our time and sufficient financial resources to the evaluation. We also learned to be patient as trust developed among stakeholders around data and mindsets shifted from skepticism to an appreciation of the value of evaluation in the work. Our communities are now making important progress in building data infrastructure, developing practices in using data to understand what is and isn't working, and sharing results with their stakeholders and the community at large (Nolan, 2018).

Showing up in communities is an essential ingredient; it shows commitment in the truest sense of the word. Engaging in tough conversations, setting tables as a neutral broker, asking hard questions, being proud – all of that matters and we are the first to tell you that community members notice.

Creating Narratives

In addition to embedding TA and evaluation in the Starting Smart and Strong communities, we provided communications support in two ways. Locally, each community was given access to the expertise of a communications firm. Together, communities and their communications consultant drafted plans for how to best meet their needs, and then implemented the plans. On a level up from that, the foundation worked with a communications firm to do two things: (1) create a narrative about Starting Smart and Strong that would document its creation, implementation, and exit; and (2) assist with field-building efforts by highlighting bright spots and elevating stories, video clips, and blog posts so that other funders and community stakeholders could learn about the work of our grantees.

Not surprisingly, relationships with our communications providers have also shifted over time. Initially, we believed that the emphasis had to stay on the work and the communities, and not on ourselves or the foundation. As we developed closer relationships with our communications providers and felt more comfortable listening to and absorbing their feedback, we realized that we had become an important set of actors in the work. If we were committed to telling the full

story of Starting Smart and Strong, the narrative had to include how our voices as program officers impacted the community change process. This seemingly small shift has created large ripples in our thinking by putting us smack in the middle of the narrative rather than placing us on its periphery, where we are typically more comfortable sitting.

What We've Learned

Three years into Starting Smart and Strong, communities have achieved tremendous progress in their efforts to create comprehensive, local early-learning ecosystems. They have built and strengthened multiagency, multisector collaborations in their communities while intentionally including beneficiary voices and perspectives. They have invested in cultivating local leadership in their communities to lead and sustain the work. They have engaged in testing and learning efforts that aim to improve the quality of adult-child interactions and have improved how they use data to support learning from what works and what doesn't. In doing so, early evaluation findings indicate positive trends related to teacher practice and child outcomes (Nolan, 2018). The three communities are laying the foundation for lasting community and systems change. And in doing this work, we share a few important lessons we have learned along the way.

- *You've got to show up.* If you think you can create community change in a place-based approach, it would be practically impossible to do so from afar in the absence of developing deep local relationships. The road to community change is littered with philanthropies who have helicoptered into communities believing that if they dropped a bag of cash, change would happen. Showing up in communities is an essential ingredient; it shows commitment in the truest sense of the word. Engaging in tough conversations, setting tables as a neutral broker, asking hard questions, being proud — all of that matters and we are the first to tell you that community members notice.

- *Be clear about how you define community.* In the early days of strategy implementation,

we asked each community to create a local leadership table that would ultimately guide the work of Starting Smart and Strong. The majority of the people who were invited to join the leadership tables were systems leaders and actors, with little to no representation from teachers, administrators, caregivers, and parents — the very constituents who would ultimately be most impacted by the work. This revealed a blind spot, as we had made an assumption that all voices, from the ground up, would be invited to the table to guide the implementation of Starting Smart and Strong. We did not have an explicit equity lens when we started the work, and for us defining community at that time meant having all kids arrive at kindergarten ready to learn. As the work progressed and deepened, equity has taken on a deeper meaning to include the voices of teachers, caregivers, and parents as participants at the decision-making tables. What resulted was a foundation decision to ask communities to focus on including constituent voice in the ongoing strategy implementation of Starting Smart and Strong, and communities agreed to develop plans to authentically bring those voices to the table.

- *Model good practice.* We've come to realize that our actions and approach to working with our Starting Smart and Strong grantees are also reflected in how they themselves are trying to work within their local communities. For example, we value the importance of constituent voice and make sure to include grantee input into designing grantee meetings and learning sessions. Similarly, grantees are soliciting constituent voice (e.g., parents and caregivers) through focus groups and interviews to inform the development of their programs. Also, as we build trust and strengthen relationships with our Starting Smart and Strong grantees, the three communities are also building trust and strengthening collaborations with their local partners.

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- *Fall down, and get back up.* We have made lots of missteps in the past three years; we've overreached in our expectations, made connections that on the surface looked promising but turned out to be more trouble than they were worth, and at times provided resources without asking our communities what they really needed — the list goes on. But we learned from each one of those mistakes and committed to each other to not make the same mistake twice. What we know about ourselves, and what our community partners have learned about us, is that there was never any bad intent in our mistakes; we're simply being human. Get back up, turn around, and say I'm sorry. It works.

- *Get a coach, not a recipe.* Very early on in the implementation of Starting Smart and Strong, we didn't trust our own instincts

When confronted by the complexity of what we created, we could have moved in either of two directions, taking the path that led to business as usual or the path that seemed riskier and less known. We chose the riskier path, and this is what we can tell you: We learn something new about the work and about ourselves every day.

and went hunting for a recipe we could follow that would lead to deep community change. We learned about many collaborative systems frameworks that were available, but none of them seemed to fit. Instead we called upon the expertise of a trusted colleague outside the foundation who deeply understood systems and inclusive community change. We engaged her to pilot alongside us as an observer, to guide us over hurdles, and help us understand the complexities of place-based work. She has become an invaluable support to us.

- *Don't be afraid to peel the onion.* We always ask for feedback from our grantees. However, in preparation for writing this article, we sought specific feedback about our engagement with Starting Smart and Strong communities to check our self-perceptions and identify potential blind spots and areas for growth. One reflection by a community grantee which we found particularly interesting was that we were not using our voices to their fullest extent. Although we were having conversations in each of our communities, those conversations were fairly safe — which is not to say that they were easy. But what she observed

was that we weren't sparking deeper conversations about issues that we could be exploring together. For example, we have not directly spoken about the inherent power dynamics embedded in funder-grantee relationships, or how issues of race and equity dynamics were showing up in the Starting Smart and Strong communities. Conversations that touch on those issues and others can be deeply personal and feel riskier to open up and explore. But if our goal is to learn and grow together, perhaps we program officers have a responsibility, as do our community partners, to help open and voice issues that make us uncomfortable. Quite possibly, embracing discomfort might be the next frontier worth exploring.

It's no surprise that trust lies at the core of authentic relationships. As program officers, we have been able to build grantee relationships that have seemed to us to be "authentic enough." By that we mean that our grantee relationships were open and respectful, but lacking much depth. But in a place-based initiative, developing trust and striving for deeper connection has come to mean something more because the stakes feel higher, especially with a 10-year time commitment. Like all functional long-term relationships, we realized that it was important to learn how to work things through with our community partners. It has compelled us to share our uncertainties, foibles, challenges, and successes with humility. We feel vulnerable a fair amount of the time as we strive to keep conversations open and alive so that we can work through issues with our partners, even when we are unsure of their outcomes. This commitment to ongoing authentic communication has become the new normal for us.

Conclusion

We have asked ourselves whether we would have engaged in Starting Smart and Strong in the same way had we known then what we know now. We can honestly say that the shift in our approach to go deeper, to be more open, and to be vulnerable has had such a profound impact on us that as program officers, we are forever changed. When confronted by the complexity of what we created, we could have moved in

either of two directions, taking the path that led to business as usual or the path that seemed riskier and less known. We chose the riskier path, and this is what we can tell you: We learn something new about the work and about ourselves every day. Even with the constant attention that Starting Smart and Strong requires, the authentic exchanges we now have with our grantees and partners bring an incredible vitality to the work. It has changed business as usual, and that has made all the difference.

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Reflective Practice

Fostering Change and Fresh Voices: Vancouver Foundation's Youth Engagement Journey

Trilby Smith, M.M., Vancouver Foundation

Introduction

By name alone, one might think that community foundations are experts in creating inclusive change in communities. Not necessarily so. Typically known as broad-based, responsive funders concerned with donor-advised funds, community foundations have not always worked deeply in and alongside community. Yet by circumstance and desire, these foundations are now taking steps toward embracing their roles as change-makers, advocates, and active community participants. Here at Vancouver Foundation, we believe the time is right to embrace those roles.

The foundation funds across the Canadian province of British Columbia. While the majority of money leaves us through donor-advised and designated funds, the balance of dollars within our responsive grantmaking funds social innovation and systems change, grassroots grantmaking, capacity building for other province-based community foundations, and youth engagement. This article focuses on our work over the past five years with two youth engagement initiatives: Fostering Change and Fresh Voices.

These initiatives emerged from work that was already happening at the foundation. Fresh Voices began in 2011, when the British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth — an advocate appointment by the provincial government — approached the foundation and asked for assistance convening newcomer youth to plan a policy forum focused on their realities. The foundation, with its previous experience running programs such as the Youth Philanthropy Council and Youth Vital Signs,
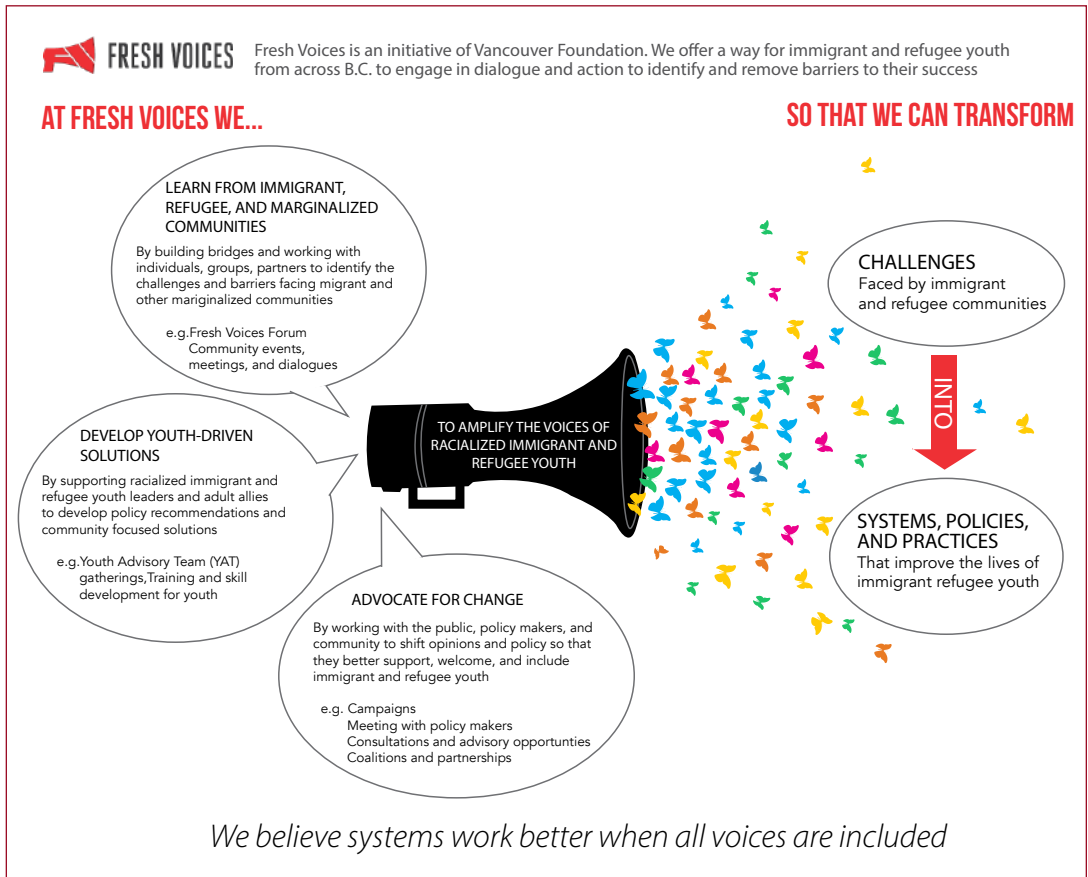
Key Points

- Since 2011, Vancouver Foundation has invested significant time, energy, ideas, and money in bringing together immigrant and refugee youth and young people with lived experience of the foster care system in British Columbia.

- Through its Fostering Change and Fresh Voices initiatives, the foundation has listened and worked in partnership with these young people to address the issues that affect their lives, and important progress has been made in the forms of meaningful policy changes and improved political engagement. The foundation is now in the process of returning these initiatives to the communities that inspired them.

- This article describes the roles the foundation played in these inclusive community change efforts, and reflects on the commitments, mindsets, and capacities necessary to effectively perform each of those roles.

drew on its network of young leaders from diverse backgrounds.

To support momentum from the conference and fill gaps in leadership opportunities for newcomer youth, the foundation continued hosting the initiative. It supported the Fresh Voices youth advisory team with significant time, energy, ideas, and funds to bring together immigrant and refugee youth, listen to them, and empower them to address issues that affect their lives. The Fresh Voices theory of change was developed

FIGURE 1 Fresh Voices Theory of Change

retrospectively as part of the five-year evaluation[1] of the initiative, conducted in 2016. (See Figure 1.)

The Fostering Change initiative developed differently. Vancouver Foundation had been making grants for several years to reduce homelessness, and youth homelessness in particular. Research and consultations with the community and policymakers pointed to the need for upstream solutions to better address why young people become homeless in the first place. Since youth who have experienced the child welfare system are vastly overrepresented among homeless youth, a new strategy, Fostering Change, was launched in 2012 with the vision that every young person leaving foster care would have the

opportunities and support necessary to thrive as an adult. (See Figure 2.) Unlike Fresh Voices, the Fostering Change team had an embedded developmental evaluator who worked alongside staff, grantees, and young people to feed data back into the work in real time.[2]

While the two initiatives developed differently, practices and approaches were often similar. (See Table 1.) Both initiatives worked at the individual, community, and systemic levels. Both initiatives kept young people at their core and aimed to influence change that would improve the circumstances of all young people aging out of foster care, and all immigrant and refugee youth.

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[1] To review the Fresh Voices Evaluation Report, please see http://freshvoices.ca/2017/06/05/fresh-voices-evaluation-report.

[2] More information on this approach can be found on the Fostering Change website: www.fosteringchange.ca

Reflective Practice

Reflective Practice

FIGURE 2 Fostering Change Placemat

VISION:
Every young person leaving foster care will have the opportunities and support needed to thrive as adults

MISSION:
To improve policy, practice and community connections for young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood

Outcomes	A growing public constituency is aware and engaged in issues facing young people in transition from care to adulthood.	Young people have increased voice and influence in planning and decision-making.	Community organizations have increased resources, knowledge and connections to better support young people.	Research, evaluation and learning expand knowledge and effectiveness.
Community Grants	• Arts and media projects highlight the issues for public understanding • Public participation projects directly engage people in the issues	• Projects led by young people highlight issues of importance to young people and provide an opportunity for the practice of meaningful youth engagement	• Projects increase inter and intra organization capacity, as well as community capacity • Multi-year support for program services provides direct support to young people making the transition from foster care to adulthood	• Real-time, supported, collaborative learning contributes to improvements in practice and highlights gaps – "what we don't know"
Youth Engagement	• Young people advise and participate in public engagement and communications work and act as co-hosts for events	• Young people are involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of everything that we do	• Expanded number and improved quality of tools and supports for young people and adult allies collaborating in community • Community organizations and communities are better able to engage in meaningful youth engagement	• Train and support young people to advise on research • Train and support young people to participate as active researchers and respondents
Shared Learning, Evaluation and Research	• Public release of findings from shared learning, evaluation and research help public understand issues facing young people in transition	• YAC captures and shares learning about meaningful youth engagement • Youth-led and youth-directed research and learning highlight issues of importance to young people and expands evidence base of what we know	• Shared Learning and Evaluation (SLE) workgroup learning products support better practice in work with young people and inform possible system and policy changes • A community of providers is built, providing a foundation for greater sharing of knowledge, resources and opportunities	• SLE workgroup collectively identifies issues and learns together (practice-learning feedback loop) • Contracted research contributes to evidence base of what we know • Ongoing measurement of experience of young people contributes to evidence base of what we know (Measure key indicators; Health, Housing, Employment, Education, Support Networks, Finance)
Public Engagement	• Increase broad public awareness of key issues • Invite participation and grow constituency • Engage public in developing possible solutions and actions	• The voice of young people and the expertise of youth leaders are amplified • Provide a platform for young people to directly interact with and influence decision-makers	• Capacity of communities is developed to be able to confidently take public roles in promoting goals for youth in care • Build credibility of organizations • Showcase what is working and amplify success • Highlight gaps in the system	• Learning with communities about issues of importance to them and where they see strengths/gaps • Generate a set of community tested "asks" that are meaningful and can be taken forward by stakeholders and assessed for relevance with broader public audiences and potential allies
WHY THIS MATTERS	Research shows that systems change is enabled by public will which requires increased visibility of and engagement with the issue.	All people have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Research shows that authentic youth engagement leads to better individual, programmatic and policy outcomes.	Research shows that fragmented services lead to poor outcomes, therefore, communities need to be supported to collaboratively surface and demonstrate programs and practices that enable better outcomes for young people.	Developing a collective understanding of what works in a BC context and what we still need to learn supports effective practice and can inform policy and system change.

fostering CHANGE
vancouver foundation

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TABLE 1 Fresh Voices and Fostering Change: Program Overviews and Outcomes

	Fresh Voices	Fostering Change
Annual program budget (excluding grants and staff, CAD)	$277,400	$468,500
Grants budget	$150,00	$901,869
Number of community groups receiving grants	8	19
Youth Advisory Team	15 youth, 6 adult allies	6 youth, 3 adult allies
Staff	2.5 FTE	3.5 FTE
Selected outcomes	• Successfully advocated for the renaming of English as a Second Language to English Language Learning (ELL); continuing advocacy for ELL graduation credits through our Make It Count campaign • Facilitated Syrian Refugee Consultation, in partnership with Immigrant Services Society of BC, to capture refugee youth experiences within the first 100 days of their settlement in Canada • Created Fresh Voices Awards to recognize the contributions of immigrant and refugee youth	• Obtained 17,000 petition signatures, demonstrating that public wants action on support for those aging out of foster care by government, business, and the community • Expanded youth engagement by nonprofits, including youth with lived experience as staff and partners in research and project implementation • Published research showing costs of up to $268 million per year are associated with the adverse experiences of youth from care, while only $57 million per year is required to improve outcomes • Created a "Candidates Pledge," signed by 147 BC election candidates, to further improve support

Reflective Practice

The foundation played various roles in supporting inclusive community change, each with its key commitments, mindsets, and capacities necessary to do the work. In the context of this article, commitments are defined as the core activities in which the foundation engaged to do the work of the Fostering Change and Fresh Voices initiatives; mindsets are the principles the foundation holds as an organization and that gave us our bearings throughout the initiatives; and capacities are the areas where we did the work, learned new skills, and developed new functions for the foundation. (See Table 2.)

A final note on terminology: The word "community" is heavily used in this article, and it is

a word that has many meanings: most common are a geographical location, a shared identity, or a group of people coming together around a specific issue or interest. In the context of this article, community is used generally to refer to some combination of these three meanings, and, more specifically, to the community outside of Vancouver Foundation's walls.

The Role of Grantmaker

At its core, Vancouver Foundation is a grantmaker. However, while its Fostering Change initiative provided grants in every year of its existence, Fresh Voices granted only in its final year, providing two opportunities:

TABLE 2 Commitments, Mindsets, and Capacities: Summary

Foundation Role	Commitments	Mindsets	Capacities
Grantmaker	Actively support community.	The grantmaker role is to fund, support, learn, and share.	Be willing to fund things that might not work.
Ally to Young People	Involve youth in building, implementing, and adapting strategies, and be clear what is possible in any given situation.	Young people are the experts.	Build trusting relationships, accept a different pace of work, and stay humble.
Public Engagement Catalyst	Build capacity for public engagement for both youth and the foundation.	The foundation must be staunchly nonpartisan; don't fight against government, support it to make change.	Fund research to support an evidence-based approach.
Advocate	Advance specific policy solutions to improve lives of immigrant and refugee youth and young people aging out of foster care.	Advocacy is a moral imperative for our organization.	Combine the foundation's credibility and influence with the power of young peoples' voices.
Learning Partner	Increase resources for learning and evaluation.	The foundation is an active partner in learning; rigorous learning is best done in the context of relationships.	Develop the internal capacity to support learning and evaluation.
Research Supplier	Fund and use research to further the goals of the initiatives.	Expand the definition of evidence to include multiple forms.	Listen more, talk less, and gather evidence along the way.

Reflective Practice

- Fresh Voices Small Grants provided up to $10,000 for youth- and community-led activities intended to activate ideas and solutions addressing the top 10 priority areas identified by immigrant and refugee youth.

- Fresh Voices Education Grants were one-year grants for school districts that had demonstrated experience, interest, and previous relationships with the Fresh Voices youth advisory team to advance the initiative's education priorities for English Language Learning (ELL) in their district. To be considered for funding, applicants were asked to demonstrate significant opportunities for immigrant, refugee, and ELL students to be engaged in advocacy, policy and practice development, research, and community engagement.

The Fostering Change approach to grantmaking evolved over time. Initially, larger multiyear grants were given for single-agency, direct-service approaches to supporting young people aging out of foster care. While this filled an important need and allowed critical services to be delivered to young people, it was not necessarily the most effective way to create change at the systemic level. Grants of different sizes with different granting criteria were eventually developed, with the aim of supporting multiple

aspects of the work. Over the lifetime of the initiative, five types of grants were given:

- Fostering Change Youth Engagement/ Youth Partnership Grants, to amplify the voices and engagement of young people and to support creating knowledge, awareness, and dialogue about experiences of youth transitioning from care to adulthood; connections between young people in and from care and their local community members; youth-led research; and creative arts-based projects. Young people were to be included in design and delivery.

- Fostering Change Community Planning and Engagement Grants, to support strategies that built capacity and common ground for shared action and learning by community stakeholders. The grants supported such work as convening and scoping early-phase engagement of stakeholders in development of practice and policy innovation; coordination of initial collective impact strategies; and local advocacy and awareness work connected to Fostering Change.

- Fostering Change Multiyear Grants, focused on supporting implementation of multiyear community-impact strategies that aligned with the priorities and principles of the initiative and helped to achieve its outcomes. The expectation was that pursuit of those outcomes would generate evidence to improve practice, policy, and levels of collaboration and community engagement. (In later years, there was an explicit requirement for applications that extended beyond direct-service and case-management approaches.) There was an expectation of participation in the foundation-supported shared learning and evaluation agenda, as well as communications, public-engagement, and youth-engagement activities.

- Fostering Change Small Grants provided up to $10,000 for youth- and community-led initiatives focused on youth engagement, relationship building, community convening, and public engagement.

With Fostering Change, the foundation knew it needed to be actively supporting community to do the hard and important work of supporting young people aging out of foster care.

- Fostering Change Legacy Grants were for legacy projects to build upon and carry forward the work of the initiative in the categories of youth engagement, capacity development, shared learning, and research.

The cumulative learning from all Fostering Change grants is still developing. Multiyear grants are still active, as is work that grew out of the grants. These grants gave organizations, communities, and young people the opportunity to think differently about how to support the needs and build on the gifts of young people aging out of foster care.

With Fostering Change, the foundation knew it needed to be actively supporting community to do the hard and important work of supporting young people aging out of foster care. Community is comprised of experts who know what is needed in this province to do a better job. Our role as a grantmaker was to fund those efforts, support and learn from them, and share that learning with people who could use the information to make change. Additionally, as a nongovernmental funder, the foundation had the ability to provide flexible funding for approaches that people thought might succeed but hadn't had a chance to test. We also had the ability to fund efforts that don't easily attract grant support: engaging youth, bringing community together, launching advocacy campaigns, and working across agencies.

The foundation funded many grants simultaneously, allowing evolution on many levels. We

Reflective Practice

In our work with young people, we were guided by their principle: nothing about us without us. The young people were the experts. They dreamed with us about what we could do and were very clear about what we could not do. The work unfolded at their pace, which was both fast and slow.

convened grantees and facilitated their sharing of what was working and what was challenging. Without the ability to fund what was meaningful to young people and the community, we would not have been able to implement other components of the initiative. Fostering Change grantmaking was also a big step for us, as a foundation, to demonstrate willingness to fund prototypes and things that might not work — but that might! By offering grants of different sizes and by offering the opportunity to share learning as it was developing, these grants offered new possibilities for a funder-grantee relationship.

The Role of Ally to Young People

Fostering Change and Fresh Voices intertwined youth engagement and political advocacy — neither of which is a common activity for a funder, especially a community foundation. In both initiatives, the youth advisory bodies were at the center. The Fresh Voices youth advisory team was composed of 15 young people, ages 14 to 24, and six adult allies; the Fostering Change Youth Advisory Circle was composed of six young people, ages 19 to 24, and three adult allies. The teams brought focus and informed the strategies every step of the way. Especially at the beginning, but also throughout the lives of the initiatives, investments were made in building trust, gathering knowledge, learning

how to work together as a group, and exploring the issues.

In our work with young people, we were guided by their principle: nothing about us without us. The young people were the experts. They dreamed with us about what we could do and were very clear about what we could not do. The work unfolded at their pace, which was both fast and slow. We certainly made missteps along the way. We learned how to talk about our expectations — and what to do when each of us, at some point, did not live up to those expectations. As one of the Fostering Change youth advisors said: "In youth engagement there are no mistakes, just learning opportunities." Among these lessons were that we need to acknowledge power differentials, not ignore them; we need to support staff well to do youth-engagement work; and we need to develop deep and trusting relationships.

In 2018, the foundation worked with a consultant to develop a Youth Engagement Learning Report that gathered and shared what has been learned about hosting deep youth-engagement initiatives at a community foundation. Through our own exploration of and reflection upon what we learned during these two initiatives, we developed a list of practices that are critical in doing youth engagement well (Glass, 2018):

- Work collaboratively with youth and staff to create clear goals for the initiative.

- Involve youth fully in building, implementing, and adapting strategies and activities through shared work plans.

- Develop terms of reference that clarify responsibilities of youth advisory members, adult allies, and foundation staff.

- Establish transparency about the extent of youth decision-making power in different situations.

- Keep youth in the loop regarding budgets, workloads, and timelines.

Reflective Practice

- Engage youth in problem solving about opportunities and constraints.

- Involve foundation staff not directly responsible for initiatives in getting to know youth and working on shared tasks.

We also identified specific ways in which we as a foundation could make it easier for youth to participate (Glass, 2018), including providing food at meetings (healthy, full meals, not just pizza), honoraria, and mass transit fare, including registration fees and travel expenses to events and conferences; scheduling meeting times that work for youth (e.g., Friday evenings); employing a variety of communication methods (e.g., graphic recording, silent reflection, sharing circles); distributing print material for young people to review rather than relying on electronic communications; and offering individualized support, such as obtaining a passport to travel and present at an overseas conference.

After taking time to reflect, we have identified several lessons learned about youth engagement work (Glass, 2018):

Involve youth early in the process and keep them in the center throughout the initiative. In both initiatives, the foundation started with youth themselves. We did not immediately develop action plans; rather, we took the time to build trust, gather knowledge, and explore the relevant issues. This early investment in young people meant that when the time came to set goals and create strategy, youth were full, informed partners.

Be intentional about which youth are being engaged and why. Both Fostering Change and Fresh Voices focused on groups of youth that experience exclusion and barriers to opportunity. This is different than a more general approach to youth engagement that imagines all youth are on a level playing field.

Acknowledge power; don't ignore it. For young people to be authentically engaged, they need to have information. Transparency about budgets, workloads, timelines, administrative

> *The highest level of engagement is when adults and youth, community members and institutions, are in it together, pooling knowledge and sharing responsibility to address challenges.*

requirements, concerns, and opportunities create a habit of openness. Building mechanisms for regular communication when things are going well helps to ensure open channels when disagreements or challenges arise. Reciprocity and respect can exist even with a power imbalance. Clarity about what is possible in any given situation is critical. This way of working takes time, dedication and patience. This clarity is underscored by a Fresh Voices youth advisor:

> When it comes to marginalized communities, it's tricky to figure out why people want to invest in you. For example, Fresh Voices could be seen as an advertisement for Vancouver Foundation, but the amount of money spent on us was a small fraction of the foundation's budget. Are they just doing this because the foundation needs to fundraise? As youth, we need transparency and clear communication to make sure that our communities are not being tokenized.

Sharing power means sharing information and responsibility. It is not empowering for youth to say what they want and expect others to implement it. Nor is it empowering to get involved in a project only to be tokenized. The highest level of engagement is when adults and youth, community members and institutions, are in it together, pooling knowledge and sharing responsibility to address challenges. One Fostering Change youth advisor characterized it this way: "I am expected to come prepared because it is part of my commitment. Be clear on what's expected of the young people and what young people are expecting of the organization supporting them."

Reflective Practice

Foundations need to create supports that allow youth engagement staff to do their best work: job security, decent pay, trust and openness with leadership, commitment to reduce barriers to youth within the organization, and efforts to ensure the youth program is understood and valued by all staff and board.

Staff who build bridges between youth and the institution are the key to success. The program managers of Fostering Change and Fresh Voices had the professional skills to lead deep community engagement. They also knew from personal experience what it was like to be a foster kid or a migrant youth. The value of this lived experience was critical to the success of both initiatives and should not be overlooked. As one Fresh Voices youth advisor put it, "Hire people who understand our journeys."

Youth engagement staff need to be well supported to support everyone else. Youth engagement staff work at the intersection between overall vision and daily practice, between adults learning to share power with youth and youth learning to work with an institution, between marginalized youth's realities and systems that were not built for them. Foundations need to create supports that allow youth engagement staff to do their best work: job security, decent pay, trust and openness with leadership, commitment to reduce barriers to youth within the organization, and efforts to ensure the youth program is understood and valued by all staff and board. Supervisory staff can also play an important role, coaching youth engagement staff who may not have experience working in a foundation to understand the institution's processes and expectations.

Respect the knowledge youth bring with them while supporting them in building the new capacity they need to lead. Fostering Change and Fresh Voices each had a dedicated training budget that youth could use for their learning priorities, such as group workshops in public policy or facilitation skills. One Fresh Voices youth told us that "being on the youth advisory team provided us with so many learning opportunities, not only within the group but also by providing us with means to go to events and learn from other amazing work that people are doing." Staff and adult allies also provided ongoing informal coaching. When youth presented at a conference or met with an elected official, program staff helped the group prepare thoroughly so that they entered with confidence and a clear message. As a Fostering Change youth advisor said,

> Real youth engagement is going that extra mile in making sure the young people are actually prepared and comfortable in the new settings that they are going to. Not just throwing them into a room and saying, "Here you go!"

In the youth advisory council, make time to get to know each other and to stay on track with the work. Youth advisory members were most proud of two things: the relationships they built with one another and the achievements they accomplished together. Time needs to be allocated to both.

Designated adult allies play a quiet but essential role in a youth advisory council, supporting young people to contribute to their fullest. From the beginning, each youth advisory council included adult allies, who are people experienced working with youth and dedicated to the goals of the initiative. Allies attended all advisory meetings and received the same modest honoraria as youth members. Their role was to build trusting relationships with the youth and assist the group to learn and work together.

The Role of Public Engagement Catalyst

To create change at a systemic level, Fostering Change and Fresh Voices both focused on building public and political will. To do this

overtly and with specific strategies was new for Vancouver Foundation, and we needed to start with building internal comfort and capacity. This is why having young people at the center was so incredibly important. The grounding and focus of the youth advisory councils provided social license or credibility to the foundation to speak out on issues of importance to immigrant and refugee youth and young people aging out of foster care.

In the Fostering Change initiative, public engagement began with public opinion research. This was important to understand how much the public knew about the issue of youth aging out of foster care and how they felt about increasing support to this population of young people. This research set a baseline for later comparisons and helped to develop the strategy for public engagement. Bringing the issue into public view was important in that it demanded that the public pay attention to something that previously had been thought to be a problem for government or for individuals and their families. By shifting the narrative to one of universality, the foundation was able to make this issue something to which everyone could relate.

Through the public opinion research, we learned that more than 90 percent of parents in British Columbia are supporting their children well into their 20s. The foundation asked why government should not do the same for the children and youth it has been parenting in the foster care system. The universality of young adulthood is undeniable; everyone has a story to tell about the help they received when they were making that transition in their own lives. It wasn't hard to engage the public in imagining the same future for these young people as they did for their own children.

From basic public opinion research, we moved into campaigning, certainly a new activity for the foundation. The first step in the campaign consisted of a supporter acquisition strategy: "Write the Future." Employing a petition to build a list of supporters, we used a combination of online outreach and street teams to gather petition signatures. In six weeks of active

In the Fostering Change initiative, public engagement began with public opinion research. This was important to understand how much the public knew about the issue of youth aging out of foster care and how they felt about increasing support to this population of young people.

campaigning, we gathered more than 15,000 signatures from people who backed increased supports for young people aging out of foster care. We now had a group with whom we could share stories, policy developments, and other news related to Fostering Change. This was important as we built toward a provincial election set for the following year.

The next phase of our campaign, "Support the 700," was focused on the 2017 provincial election in British Columbia. The foundation developed a pledge that asked candidates to commit to four actions related to improved supports for young people aging out of foster care. We activated our Fostering Change supporters, who reached out to the candidates; 40 percent of them signed the pledge. The platforms of the three primary parties included specific mention of youth aging out of foster care, and in a televised debate leaders were asked what they would do to improve support for these young people.

The May 2017 election resulted in a change of government, and since then Fostering Change has been working to hold officials to their promises; 41 of the candidates who signed the pledge were elected. One of the pledge's actions was to "meet with young leaders from foster care this fall to hear their insights and ideas on how to make a successful start in their adult years." That

Recognition of and comfort with our own influence is a process that has been evolving at the foundation over the past couple of years through the development of our own theory of philanthropy.

meeting took place, and work is ongoing to hold these elected officials to their promise to "advocate for increased funding for youth aging out of foster care so that they get consistent financial support, long-term relationships with caring dependable adults, and stronger community connections."

Acting as a public engagement catalyst exercised lots of new muscles for the foundation. We did not have in-house expertise on running campaigns, but simply contracting out this work would not be easy, since our commitment was to involve young people in as many aspects of the campaign as possible. We wanted to both build their capacity for public engagement and have their insights and knowledge inform the developing strategy. Further, we wanted to develop the capacity of the foundation. We opted to partner with contractors who had the skills and capacities to teach and learn as they worked.

Another critical mindset (and necessity) was to remain staunchly nonpartisan — as a registered charity, it is unlawful for the foundation to engage in partisan lobbying. We educated ourselves — and our executives, board, and young people — on the rules as they pertain to election campaigns. And we were fortunate to be working on an issue for which there was strong bipartisan support.

Part of our approach was to give the provincial government license for something that we knew it already wanted to do. We began with the belief that the government wanted to do the right thing and that we were not fighting against it. This was not a commonly held belief in the sector, but we held the line and acknowledged that government has a lot of constraints — and it makes choices about the issues it wants to champion. It was our belief that elected officials are more likely to work hard to change policy when they think the public is behind them. We wanted the government to know that more than 15,000 British Columbians were in favor of greater support for youth aging out of care, and the foundation-funded economic research found that the province could save $200 million annually by offering that support. All of this information was aimed at helping government make the necessary changes.

The Role of Advocate

In a sense, being a public engagement catalyst and being an advocate go hand in hand, but it's possible to engage the public without being an advocate for a particular policy solution. Once again, Fostering Change and Fresh Voices broke new ground for the foundation in advancing specific policy solutions to improve the lives of immigrant and refugee youth and young people aging out of foster care. Advocacy again required being strictly nonpartisan and making explicit use of the foundation's influence.

Recognition of and comfort with our own influence is a process that has been evolving at the foundation over the past couple of years through the development of our own theory of philanthropy. We are a well-connected and well-respected organization in the community. We can ask for help from our mayor and prominent local people. We have a history of working with multiple levels of government. We often appear on Canadian Broadcasting Corp. television and radio and in our local newspapers. Through Fostering Change and Fresh Voices, we used all of the tools at our disposal to amplify the voices and experiences of young people. Our deep engagement with young people and community, and our investment in research and grantmaking, allowed us to feel confident in our advocacy positions. Here are some concrete components of our advocacy work:

Reflective Practice

- Work with young people to identify and prioritize policy recommendations; then get input from other system actors when choosing where to focus. Influencing policy usually requires sustained effort on a small number of solutions at the relevant jurisdictional level. Shopping around recommendations with policymakers can help to focus and build advocacy strategies that are aligned with young peoples' vision. We also learned that advocacy is about windows of opportunity, and we worked hard to align our work to those windows.

- Create venues where youth and decision-makers can discuss public policy. This is not a common occurrence, but Fresh Voices and Fostering Change worked hard to build opportunities for young people to speak directly with policymakers. In the Youth Engagement Learning Report, a Fostering Change youth advisor stressed that "it is important to engage young people to talk about the systemic issues, and not just personal storytelling." Fresh Voices youth met on numerous occasions with British Columbia's minister and deputy minister of education, and young people from Fostering Change held a Policy Solutions Day in Victoria, where they spoke directly to elected officials, including the premier and cabinet ministers. As one Fresh Voices youth advisor said, "We did our best to create spaces where policymakers and young people were equals in expertise."

- Combine the foundation's credibility with young peoples' voices. A powerful example of this came in early 2017, when the United States issued a travel ban on certain countries. Vancouver Foundation's CEO quickly issued a public statement alongside a Fresh Voices youth advisor who had arrived in Canada as a refugee from Iran.

Many of the commitments, mindsets, and capacities related to the role of public engagement catalyst are also applicable to advocates. In addition, the foundation views advocacy as a moral imperative for the organization. As Roger Gibbins

In both initiatives, the foundation's interest has been to learn as much as possible and then to use what it has learned to influence change at the systemic level. This endeavor has been approached with humility and a beginner's mindset. The foundation is not the expert, and must always be conscious of the role it is playing and the power dynamics that are inherent in its relationships.

(2016), a Canadian academic and philanthropy leader wrote in The Philanthropist, "Policy advocacy is a moral obligation, and if charities do not make government uncomfortable, they are not delivering on their charitable mission."

The Role of Learning Partner

In both initiatives, the foundation's interest has been to learn as much as possible and then to use what it has learned to influence change at the systemic level. This endeavor has been approached with humility and a beginner's mindset. The foundation is not the expert, and must always be conscious of the role it is playing and the power dynamics that are inherent in its relationships.

In Fostering Change, the decision was made early on to approach evaluation differently than the foundation had in the past. Up to this point, it had operated on the model of an accountability relationship: funding individual grantees at a modest level to conduct evaluations of their own projects, which were then shared with the foundation as part of grantee reporting. However,

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Our role was to help figure out the best structures, processes, and resourcing that would allow grantees to reflect on what they were learning, share that learning with others, and then build the collective learning into their own work. This shared learning was evident in grant applications, partnership agreements, youth capacity development, and many other places.

the benefits of those evaluations were limited to the grantee and the foundation. There were no opportunities to share what was being learned among grantees, and the foundation did not make extensive use of the individual project evaluation findings. So, the decision was made to remove the requirement for individual evaluations, and the grantees were instead given funding to compensate for staff time to participate in shared learning and evaluation activities.

This shared learning and evaluation work evolved over time. It was the first time that the foundation had a dedicated staff person for learning and evaluation. That staff person began by forming a shared learning and evaluation working group composed of representatives from grantees who were receiving larger multiyear grants. The foundation was very conscious of not asking for too much from grantees that were only receiving small grants. This learning and evaluation working group co-created a learning agenda and set out to learn together.

After approximately a year of working in this way, the shared learning and evaluation work

was made accessible to all grantees at their request. This arrangement made it no longer tenable to have only one table or working group, so the model evolved into learning "pods." Each pod was focused on an aspect of the work, such as housing, education, or culture. Grantee staff self-selected into these pods, and each worked through a prototyping cycle, selecting a practice that they were interested in trying and then planning, studying, prototyping, reflecting, and sharing.

All grantees across the pods came together periodically for Grantee Learning Days to share what they were doing and to learn from one another. The work then evolved into a much more open and large-scale attempt to involve people from across the community, although primarily Fostering Change grantees, who were involved in supporting young people aging out of foster care. Throughout, the foundation acted as a learning partner. Our role was to help figure out the best structures, processes, and resourcing that would allow grantees to reflect on what they were learning, share that learning with others, and then build the collective learning into their own work. This shared learning was evident in grant applications, partnership agreements, youth capacity development, and many other places.

In Fresh Voices, learning and evaluation looked different. Because there was no granting component until the final year of the initiative, the funder-grantee relationship did not exist and the need for accountability around grant expenditures was not present. However, learning was still very much a part of the work. As with Fostering Change, foundation staff worked from a place of humility and a beginner's mindset.

Fresh Voices was rigorous regarding documentation and reporting from all its events, forums, and other gatherings. Learning at each step of the journey was always folded back into whatever was being planned next. The foundation hired an evaluator to conduct a more formal external evaluation of Fresh Voices at the initiative's five-year mark. This evaluation grew out of the desire to synthesize and make meaning

of the experience, and to articulate strengths and accomplishments as well as any challenges. The evaluation was guided by an advisory committee, composed of equal membership of youth advisory team members and foundation staff. Together with the evaluator, the advisory committee ensured that the evaluation was meaningful to Fresh Voices stakeholders, particularly young people.

The role of learning partner required a substantial shift in how the foundation had approached evaluation. The commitment to learning and evaluation increased through this work, as the foundation became a much more active participant and invested significantly more time and money resources in supporting learning and evaluation. In this approach to learning and evaluation, process was as important as content. The processes we relied on were drawn heavily from the Art of Hosting approach to leadership,[3] which contributed greatly to the building of relationships between grantees and between the foundation and grantees, and allowed us to hold up the wisdom of community and young people.

Working in this way also required different capacities. Instead of relying on an external, third-party evaluator, we were all getting into the muck, rolling up our sleeves and trying to make sense of things. Evaluator became facilitator, relationship builder and champion.

The Role of Research Supplier

In both initiatives, building the body of evidence was critical. Although we know a great deal about the life experiences of young immigrants and refugees and young people aging out of foster care, there is not a wealth of research in these areas — particularly focused on British Columbia. So, through a variety of channels, we acted as a research grantmaker, a research contractor, and a research supporter.

Fresh Voices youth advisory team members were called upon repeatedly to share their newcomer experiences for various research projects. For

example, a Ph.D. student at the University of British Columbia School of Nursing was conducting dissertation research with male immigrants and refugees ages 15 to 22 on their perspectives on and experiences of mental health. Young men who were current and former Fresh Voices youth advisory team members were interviewed, filmed, and co-directed a video that accompanied the completed dissertation.

The foundation also led a study published as *Employment, Mobility and Integration: Experiences of Immigrant and Refugee Youth in Metro Vancouver* (Vancouver Foundation 2018). The primary data for this research were obtained through surveys conducted in the community, facilitated and led by a youth research subcommittee from Fresh Voices. The research asked: "How does physical mobility, economic access, and social networks affect immigrant and refugee youth employment integration over time?"

The most high-profile piece of research for Fostering Change, which was critical to public-will building and advocacy efforts, was *Opportunities in Transition: An Economic Analysis of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care,* (Vancouver Foundation 2016) Although there has been some economic analysis done previously in other jurisdictions in Canada, this work took a groundbreaking approach and worked with data that were specific to British Columbia. The findings of this research, together with our public opinion research, helped to build the case that most people in British Columbia were in favor of increasing support for young people aging out of care and that a shift in policy made economic sense as well.

For better or for worse, traditional academic research can garner significant media attention. It is the kind of evidence that people recognize as such, and therefore has legitimacy in a way that other kinds of evidence are only beginning to achieve. By working with academics who were willing to utilize participatory research methods and engage directly with young people,

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[3] The Art of Hosting approach scales up from the personal to the systemic using personal practice, dialogue, facilitation, and the co-creation of innovation to address complex challenges.

By working with academics who were willing to utilize participatory research methods and engage directly with young people, we were able to build the capacity of both the academics and young people.

we were able to build the capacity of both the academics and young people. We were also better able to integrate this traditional form of evidence with the other forms of evidence that we were building.

Funding research is not a new role for funders, or even for community foundations. Traditionally, however, funders provide grants for research, but don't necessarily get involved in any substantial way in the actual research. In Fostering Change and Fresh Voices, research was used to further the goals of the initiatives and foundation staff, young people, and other stakeholders were deeply involved. From advisory committees to co-researcher relationships, they helped to shape the methodologies and the framing and reporting of the findings.

Although we did rely on and fund traditional forms of research and evidence in Fostering Change and Fresh Voices, it was part of a greater strategy of expanding the definition of evidence. The foundation intentionally challenged itself and others to rethink evidence. We worked to ensure that the voices of those most affected by the issues we are striving to change are louder. We wanted to listen more and talk less. We wanted to explore evidence where it lives. We knew that we didn't have time to try a fully developed approach, see if it worked, and then five years later realize that it was the wrong approach. We need to edit and curate on the fly, capture information as we went, and use multiple methods to gather intelligence. Listening to young people, giving grants to community,

bringing agencies together to reflect on what they were learning, conducting systemic analyses, learning what the public is thinking, influencing what the public knows, and talking to those who hold political office were all part of our strategy to mobilize multiple forms of evidence.

Conclusion

Throughout the lives of the Fostering Change and Fresh Voices initiatives, Vancouver Foundation acknowledged that the wisdom and commitment to this work resided in community. In 2018, both were returned to the communities that inspired them. While the board was clear from the beginning that these initiatives would not reside permanently at the foundation, there is no playbook or set of rules for how a foundation sunsets its funding for an initiative and hands over the leadership to the community. We are still navigating this process. For each initiative, a community agency was given a grant to sustain the work, and the first year of the shift to community ownership is just ending.

Youth engagement remains a permanent capacity of the foundation, and our new youth engagement initiative, LEVEL, builds on the relationships, lessons, and capacities developed through our work on Fresh Voices and Fostering Change. LEVEL includes grantmaking, grassroots organizing, and a public policy component to address racial equity within the nonprofit sector. Additionally, LEVEL continues the practice of being intentional about the youth we are engaging and focuses explicitly on indigenous and racialized immigrant and refugee young people.

For Fresh Voices and Fostering Change, the foundation is now supporter, cheerleader, ally, former funder, and legacy holder. Through this work we have been given the gift of walking alongside the community. We have explored the edges of what is feasible for a community foundation funder, and it is at those edges where inclusive community change is possible.

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Reflective Practice

The Goldilocks Challenge:
Right-fit Evidence for the Social Sector

Reviewed by Veena Pankaj

The spotlight on performance and accountability throughout the nonprofit sector has made it more important than ever for nonprofits to understand and demonstrate their effectiveness and impact. Knowing what data to collect is vital to the success of all social sector organizations. In their book, *The Goldilocks Challenge: Right-Fit Evidence for the Social Sector,* Mary Kay Gugerty and Dean Karlan equate the struggle to find the right-fit in monitoring and evaluation systems to the challenges that Goldilocks faces in the fairytale of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears.*

Gugerty and Karlan bring an academic perspective grounded in development economics steeped in the research and issues surrounding management and accountability within the social sector. Through her work on nonprofit performance and accountability systems, Gugerty has the vantage of the people within organizations trying to prove impact and make program improvements. Karlan contributes a different viewpoint through his research on measuring the impact of programs and offers additional context from work in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This book is written for those within social sector organizations who are developing decision-making systems to improve programs and impact.
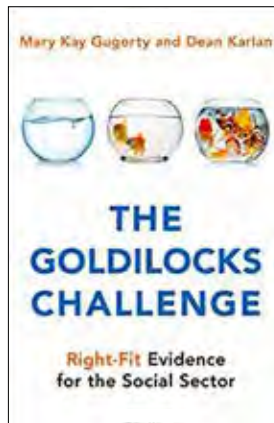
The Goldilocks Challenge: Right-fit Evidence for the Social Sector by Mary Kay Gugerty and Dean Karlan, Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN: 019936608X, 9780199366088

Through a series of illustrative examples and case studies, the authors present a framework to guide the selection of a "right-fit" evaluation approach. The framework introduced in this book incorporates four principles, referred to as the CART principles:[1]

- Credible – Collect high-quality data and analyze them accurately.

- Actionable – Collect data you can commit to use.

- Responsible – Ensure the benefits of data collection outweigh the costs.

- Transportable – Collect data that generate knowledge for other programs.

The authors emphasize that CART principles can guide organizations to select the type of data to collect, and when it may or may not be useful to consider impact evaluation. While the concepts within the CART principles are not new to the sector, presenting them in clear, logical, easy-to-follow steps is a valuable contribution to the field. The straight-forward presentation of concepts backed by examples will help nonprofit leaders and program staff better understand the distinction between monitoring and evaluation, and be more intentional and focused when collecting data. The insights provided by *The Goldilocks Challenge* will enhance the ability of

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[1] Gugerty, M. K., Karlan, D. (2018). *The Goldilocks Challenge: Right-fit Evidence for the Social Sector.* New York. Oxford University Press, p. 10.

social sector organizations to facilitate conversations with funders about what types of data collection methods are appropriate using the CART principles as a guide post. Similarly, the approach outlined in this book can also help funders set realistic expectations when requesting data from the organizations they fund.

The Goldilocks Challenge is organized into three distinct sections: Part 1 focuses on the CART principles and delivers a detailed description of each. Part 2 provides case examples highlighting real-world experiences across a range of social sector organizations. The concrete examples illustrated through these cases further reinforce the CART principles highlighted in the first part of the book. Part 3 examines the topics explored by this book from a funder perspective. Although brief, this section provides readers with a glimpse of alternative approaches to accountability such as the Pay for Success model, nonprofit rating systems, and impact audits.

The CART principles presented in this book support programmatic learning and provide guidance on collecting actionable data for decisionmaking, learning, and improvement. The academic and research-oriented lens of the authors bring rigor to these principles, distinguishing between data needs for monitoring and evaluation and raising the bar on evidence for impact. For example, Gugerty and Karlan highlight the importance of knowing what would have happened in the absence of a program, also referred to as a counterfactual, to fully understand program impact. While I appreciate the need to understand causal impact beyond outcomes, it is worth acknowledging another body of work within the social sector that does not fit neatly within this paradigm. This work stems from the growing desire among social sector organizations to restructure and shape systems to promote social good — a byproduct of our current political and environmental climate. Organizations working in this space typically engage in advocacy and policy change work and operate under conditions of uncertainty, marked by flexible boundaries, emergent strategies, and shifting timelines, making it difficult, if not impossible, to establish a counterfactual. In lieu

> *To be credible, as defined by the authors, data need to be valid, reliable, and free of bias. I encourage those that adopt this framework to integrate a broader definition of credibility, one that incorporates stakeholder perspectives in defining constructs and determining what is considered credible and what is not.*

of counterfactuals, approaches such as process tracing and contribution analysis have emerged to systematize and provide rigor around the range of evidence collected to demonstrate causality. Albeit important to set a high bar for measuring impact, there is value in maintaining some degree of flexibility in defining what we construe to be credible evidence.

While the CART principles are designed to help organizations streamline data collection to promote data use, there is a tension between how *credibility* is defined by the authors and how it may be interpreted by practitioners in the field. The CART principles do not take into account stakeholder involvement and participation in the evaluation process. To be *credible,* as defined by the authors, data need to be valid, reliable, and free of bias. I encourage those that adopt this framework to integrate a broader definition of credibility, one that incorporates stakeholder perspectives in defining constructs and determining what is considered credible and what is not. Through my work as an evaluation strategist for nonprofits and foundations, I have found that involving stakeholders in operationalizing a concept invites a diversity of perspective that contributes to the overall credibility of the evaluation from the vantage point of program

stakeholders, which in turn leads to buy-in and use, contributing to the overall *actionability* of the evaluation results.

One of the distinguishing features of this book is the authors' unrelenting focus on evaluation use. The *actionable* principle promoted by the authors suggests that organizations only collect data they can and will use. From my perspective, one of the biggest challenges experienced by social sector organizations is finding ways to embed data collection and evaluative thinking into the culture of the organization. I appreciate the authors' emphasis on organizational practices, such as internal data sharing and reporting, as a means to create a culture of learning and inquiry.

What I value the most about this book is the authors' ability to take the challenges they witnessed through their own work to create a simple, easy-to-follow framework that addresses those challenges. Their aptitude to understand these struggles from the perspective of those experiencing them comes through in their ability to clearly define concepts, provide guidelines, and share illustrative examples to help organizations make informed decisions about what data to collect. This is especially relevant in a world where data is abundant and expectations for accountability continue to grow. It is more important than ever for organizations to demonstrate their impact or contributions towards it, through right-fit data approaches for monitoring and evaluation.

Book Review

*Veena Pankaj, M.A.,* is Director of Innovation Network.

Decolonizing Wealth

Reviewed by Juan Olivarez

Writing from their vantage point as funders, Jennifer and Peter Buffett write a compelling forward to *Decolonizing Wealth*. They briefly tell the story of how they became privileged to be entrusted with enormous wealth, thanks to Peter's father, Warren Buffett. In their quest to get advice from "experts" like heads of state, investment managers, corporate leaders, entrepreneurs, and other big philanthropists, they quickly realized that the circle is "overwhelmingly" white and male. They also concluded that they needed to find "fresh ideas that show unusual promise for significant impact."

The Buffetts describe the book's author, Edgar Villanueva, as a Native American who is humble and radical. They praise Villanueva's thinking and for posing the question, "What if?" What if money was used as medicine to heal trauma and wounds of the past and current times? As philanthropists, they give the author credit for their discoveries of the deep wisdom of local communities, rather than chasing expertise from outside. They are truly practicing "Decolonizing Wealth."

In the introduction, Villanueva welcomes readers and makes the premise clear that the "colonizer virus" is part of all of us, making us divide, control, and exploit. He conveys strong sentiments that this virus is especially alive when we deal with wealth. The author does not hold back in recognizing that this may be uncomfortable for some who read this book, especially white men. However, he wants readers to understand that many people (himself included) have been
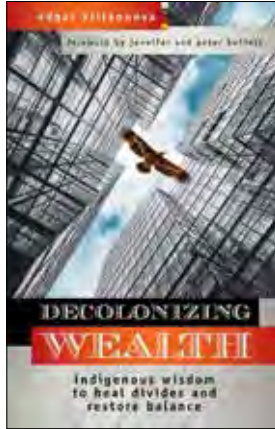
Decolonizing Wealth
by Edgar Villanueva,
Berrett-Koehler
Publishers, Inc., 2018.
ISBN: 9781523097890,
1523097892

uncomfortable over many years of colonization. In this book, Villanueva calls for decolonizing wealth and explains how money can be used as medicine to heal.

Villanueva is quite critical about philanthropy, arguing that at its core is colonialism, which reinforces the division of us vs. them, haves vs. have nots, white saviors and white experts vs. the poor, needy, urban, disadvantaged, and marginalized. The author uses metrics to make the point about the lack of diversity among CEOs and boards of foundations and the small portion of funding that actually goes to people of color.

In Part I of the book, "Where It Hurts," Villanueva quickly introduces the notion that it's not just the distribution of dollars in grant making that perpetuate the colonizer virus, but also where the corpus of the foundation is invested. Villanueva believes the latter is just as important in making the point on the issue of colonialism. Very few foundations are using social, moral, and environmental filters for picking investments. And the author widens the scope even further by including banks, venture capitalists, municipal bonds holdings, and other financial institutions for perpetuating white supremacy, savior mentality, and internalized oppression. Again, the use of metrics makes this point relevant in terms of who holds the position of power.

Villanueva's use of storytelling, historical documentation, and Native American cultural information is brilliant. These techniques to get his message across are impactful. Chapter one

[T]hese ideas to creating a better financial and philanthropic field will appear radical to some long-standing institutions. However, he believes that radical changes are necessary if we are to create a new paradigm of connect, relate, and belong vs. divide, control, and exploit.

"Stolen and Sold" begins by the author's own description of who he is and where he's from. It is clear that he holds great pride in his heritage as a Native American.

This first chapter grips your soul as it describes the early colonizers and the treatment of Native Americans. It dives deep into the concept of colonization and the conquering mentality. Not only did Indigenous people lose their resources but they were stripped of their bodies, minds, and souls. They were forced to become like the colonizers. The most compelling example was the separation of children from parents. The children were put in boarding schools to be acculturated in new ways. This was intended to be the stripping of the Indigenous worldview, which emphasizes connection, reciprocity, a circular dynamic.

The author sets a compelling framework for the understanding of colonization, trauma, and the main premise of decolonization. He begins to inform the reader that healing is necessary to eradicate the colonizer virus from society by using money as medicine. Instead of using wealth to divide, control, and exploit, the new paradigm needs to be connect, relate, and belong.

In chapters two, "Arriving at the Plantation," three, "House Slaves," four, "Field Hands," and five, "The Overseers," Villanueva describes his journey in philanthropy and the challenging experiences he encountered as a person of color. This deep dive into his very personal story helps to illustrate the conscious and unconscious bias that he (and others) experienced through a variety of situations. These stories help the reader understand Villanueva's own personal discovery of who he is and how his beliefs gave him strength and perseverance.

These chapters are full of historical reference to the days of colonizing. Many of these characteristics are used as metaphors to describe philanthropic and financial institutions today. He makes persuasive points about organizational structure, language used, behaviors and physical environment, which perpetuate divisive, command and control over haves and have nots. In addition, he emphasizes how power is used, as colonizers did, to divide, control and exploit others.

Villanueva is critical of initiatives pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion, concluding that forming committees, going to trainings, conducting research and adding terminologies to websites and brochures is necessary, but not sufficient. He argues that the result of real change will be evident when the number of CEOs, other executives, and board members at the decision-making table reflect a much higher number of people of color and women. It will also be evident when the percentage of philanthropic dollars increases in communities of color, and that real solutions come from the people closest to the problems.

The last chapter in Part I, "Freedom," explains Villanueva's quest to be more connected to his Native roots. He describes how he received his Indian name, *Niigaanii Beneshi,* meaning Leading Bird. This was a moment in time when he really wanted to understand the role of a leader and started to learn more about migrating birds and their behavior. This is when he really understood that his calling was to be a servant leader, and continued to understand how organizational models that incorporate compassion and

empathy will be the best design for decolonizing wealth. This last chapter in Part I prepares the reader for Part II, "How to Heal."

In Part II, Villanueva introduces Seven Steps to Healing. He acknowledges that these ideas to creating a better financial and philanthropic field will appear radical to some long-standing institutions. However, he believes that radical changes are necessary if we are to create a new paradigm of connect, relate, and belong vs. divide, control, and exploit.

The seven steps are described one-by-one, with stories and examples to get his message across. They are:

1. **Grieve:** encouragement is given to not be afraid to feel the hurt people have endured through the act of colonization. This first step is important to understand how money was used and managed, how transactions became more important than relationships, and how we lost humanity. He includes all of us in this process, individuals and organizations as a whole. This step of healing brings out the authenticity of each of us by acknowledging that we need to confront the reality of what happened, and what continues to happen, to create wealth. Here he turns to leaders to create a safe space and to model listening, compassion, and empathy.

2. **Apologize:** the expression and act of saying "I'm sorry" for the hurt that has been caused. This step acknowledges that most wealth came from stealing land and resources, the exploitation of slaves, and low-wage workers. Again, we are all made to feel a part of the behaviors of greed and other actions that revolve around money. As decent people, we should admit when we've done wrong.

3. **Listen:** being open to the wisdom of those exploited by the system. We are encouraged to have civil conversations with the focus of this step being on engagement. We are reminded that people who need help know best what that looks likes for best results.

We are asked to get away from rigid structures, and holding back from conclusions, opinions, and judgments; just be open and curious.

4. **Relate:** connect with each other in order to understand that we don't have to agree in order to respect each other. This step encourages us to be mindful of being in relationship with our clients, not just thinking of our work as transactional. We are reminded that our physical environment, where we interact, should be welcoming to our constituents. Mutual trust, respect and appreciation are also key ingredients in establishing strong relationships.

5. **Represent:** create real decision-making tables, where people are more than a token. This requires bringing in people who represent the people being served. It also requires that authenticity of what they bring to the table is recognized and valued. We will need to make decisions about funding based on many representatives at the table, not just one or two. We must work toward shared ownership and full inclusion.

6. **Invest:** use strong values in deciding where we invest our money (for earnings). The two concepts for accomplishing this step are spending rules and what we invest in. The spending rule should be reviewed occasionally and perhaps draw down more than the usual 5 percent so more money gets into the community. The investment policies must also be reviewed to make sure we are investing in things that support "doing good," which is usually characterized as ethical investing, socially responsible investing, or impact investing. Being transparent about these two aspects is encouraged.

7. **Repair:** use money to heal. In this last step, foundations and financial institutions are encouraged to think of money as the most powerful means to heal the racial wealth gap. Once again, an argument is made to make reparations because of the near genocide of Native Americans 500-200 years ago.

Much of what Villanueva conveys in these steps are stories and beliefs of indigenous people, and the wisdom they have acquired over time. He is quite adamant that foundations currently do not reflect the "love for humanity," as philanthropy is defined. He believes many possess and perpetuate ego, greed, fear, blame, and disrespect by how they are structured, and by how they behave. He also accuses financial institutions for discrimination in practices which keeps wealth disproportionately concentrated in white communities.

Villanueva doesn't just criticize, he offers solutions through many examples and ideas. He concludes with a powerful story and tells the reader, "the Native way is to bring the oppressor into our circle of healing. Healing cannot occur unless everyone is part of the process." And he encourages all of us "to begin."

Reading *Decolonizing Wealth* may be uncomfortable for those who share the hurt or for those offended by Villanueva's direct accusations. However, this is a must read. The observations, information, cultural awareness and the emotions elicited by Villanueva should serve as a starting point for conversations and mutual efforts to heal divides and restore balance.

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Book Review

Executive Summaries

Results

9 Community Navigation as a Field of Practice: Reframing Service Delivery to Meet the Needs of Communities' Marginalized Populations

Joby Schaffer, M.A., Spark Policy Institute; M. Julie Patiño, J.D., P. Barclay Jones, B.S., and LaDawn Sullivan, B.S., The Denver Foundation

The Denver Foundation launched the Basic Human Needs Navigator Learning Community in February 2014 to help navigators working with local organizations and community members improve their practice and identify similarities and differences in their approaches. This article discusses the multiyear, peer-learning project, including the general lessons the foundation learned about both navigation and the use of a learning-community approach to reach its field-building goals. Reports from participating organizations and community members over four years suggest the efficacy of both navigation as a model for addressing gaps in service provision and of the learning-community approach in driving early-stage field-building outcomes.

22 By Us and For Us: A Story of Early Childhood Development Systems Change and Results in a Rural Context

Lisa Payne Simon, M.P.H., and Clare Nolan, M.P.P., Engage R+D; Kirsten Scobie, M.A. and Phoebe Backler, B.A., New Hampshire Charitable Foundation; Catherine McDowell, M.A., Coös Coalition for Young Children and Families; Charles Cotton, M.S.W., Northern Human Services; and Susan Cloutier, B.S., White Mountains Community College

The Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund – a donor-advised fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation – invests in early childhood development in Coös County, New Hampshire's largest and most rural and economically disadvantaged county. Local community members joined forces with the fund to create an integrated early childhood development system for Coös' children and families. The evaluation documented increased capacity and quality and surfaced lessons for funders and others pursuing systems change efforts in early learning, and in rural areas more broadly.

Tools

40 A New Tool for New Times? Using Geographic Information Systems in Foundations and Other Nonprofit Organizations

Jeffrey L. Brudney, Ph.D., and Christopher R. Prentice, Ph.D., University of North Carolina Wilmington

This article examines how a tool relatively new to nonprofits — geographic information systems — can support community building. Three trends — rising use of GIS overall and potential for technology transfer to nonprofit organizations, the decreased cost of GIS

software and relevant data, and the increased number of public servants trained in GIS — present a convincing case that nonprofits, and particularly foundations, will be able to make greater use of this valuable technology to increase public participation, incorporate diverse stakeholders, improve organizational operations, increase market efficiencies, and build stronger communities.

51   Creating Habits for Inclusive Change

Pennie Foster-Fishman, Ph.D., and Erin Watson, Ph.D., Michigan State University

The act of transforming community outcomes requires diverse stakeholders across an array of settings to become actors of change. Drawing from the ABLe Change Framework systems-change model, this article presents four processes used in numerous communities across the United States to effectively engage diverse stakeholders in taking actions to improve local systems. This article introduces the ABLe Change Framework tools, which are used to promote these action-oriented habits, and then discusses how foundations can use them to create the conditions that promote inclusive community change.

72   Thriving Communities: A Model for Community-Engaged Grantmaking

Mary Francis, M.A.E.D., Colleen Desmond, M.P.H., Jeffrey Williams, B.S., and Jennifer Chubinski, Ph.D., Interact for Health; Jennifer Zimmerman, M.S.W., bi3; and Ashlee Young, M.P.H., StrivePartnership

Interact for Health, a health conversion foundation serving the three-state region of Greater Cincinnati, Ohio, supports Thriving Communities a community-learning model. The goal is to embed health promotion and advocacy work in communities while building an equitable infrastructure to spread evidence-based practices. This article describes three tools developed for the Thriving Communities initiative: Success Markers, the Developmental Pathway, and Relationship Mapping. Interact for Health has found that these tools build core competencies and confidence among grantees as well as a process for community engagement that produces results at the local level.

Reflective Practice

91   Equity for All: Building the Infrastructure for Change Through Community-First Funder Collaboratives

Ellen Braff-Guajardo, M.Ed., J.D., Kaying Hang, M.P.H., and Leslie Cooksy, Ph,D., Sierra Health Foundation; Monica Braughton, M.P.P., Harder+Company Community Research; and Fontane Lo, M.P.H., James Irvine Foundation

In recent years, funder collaboratives have become more common as a tool for increasing and coordinating philanthropic investments to address the root causes of inequity, while staying responsive to shifting needs and political priorities. This article describes a "community first" model, which emerged from the experience of a funders collaborative created to advance equity through policy and systems change in California's San Joaquin Valley. Initial

findings indicate that the fund has helped to seed a regional movement for change. When philanthropy aims to advance equity, it makes sense to use a model that seeks to create a partnership between funders and community — a model that seeks to act equitably by putting the community first.

103 A Partnered Approach to School Change in a Rural Community: Reflections and Recommendations

Sara E. Rimm-Kaufman, Ph.D., University of Virginia; Mary Fant Donnan, M.Env.St., and Dianne Garcia, B.S., Alleghany Foundation; Melinda Snead-Johnson, M.Ed., Covington City Public Schools; Eugene Kotulka, M.Ed., Alleghany County Public Schools; and Lia E. Sandilos, Ph.D., Temple University

With so many education policies and practices made at the local level, community-based foundations are in a unique position to support their local school districts in taking a comprehensive, systematic approach to improving the lives of young people. This article describes a research–practice partnership designed to produce school improvement in a rural community in western Virginia and reflects on a three-year collaboration among The Alleghany Foundation, two school districts, and the University of Virginia. The collaboration provided clear evidence that sustained change will occur only if it aligns with the goals of school leaders and fully engages members of the community, and it sheds light on the unique challenges and strengths present in a small rural community that will influence foundation work. The process produced five recommendations for foundations that seek a partnered approach to school change.

119 An End to Business as Usual: Nurturing Authentic Partnerships to Create Lasting Community Change

Jeffrey Sunshine, Ph.D., and Bernadette Sangalang, Ph.D., David and Lucile Packard Foundation

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation created Starting Smart and Strong, a 10-year place-based commitment to early learning in three California communities. This article offers key insights into the foundation's experience, three years into implementation, with managing this complex initiative and how program officers were compelled to think differently about the best roles staff can play to support grantee communities and amplify constituent voice. Program officers also had to develop new capacities that both focus on the development of systems that are locally designed and driven and work in service of the foundation's broader strategy goals.

130 Fostering Change and Fresh Voices: Vancouver Foundation's Youth Engagement Journey

Trilby Smith, M.M., Vancouver Foundation

Since 2011, Vancouver Foundation has invested significant time, energy, ideas, and money in bringing together immigrant and refugee youth and young people with lived experience of the foster care system in British Columbia. Through its Fostering Change and Fresh Voices

initiatives, the foundation has listened and worked in partnership with these young people to address the issues that affect their lives, and important progress has been made in the forms of meaningful policy changes and improved political engagement. The foundation is now in the process of returning these initiatives to the communities that inspired them. This article describes the roles the foundation played in these inclusive community change efforts, and reflects on the commitments, mindsets, and capacities necessary to effectively perform each of those roles.

Book Reviews

146   *The Goldilocks Challenge: Right-fit Evidence for the Social Sector* by Mary Kay Gugerty and Dean Karlan

Reviewed by Veena Pankaj, Innovation Network

The spotlight on performance and accountability throughout the nonprofit sector has made it more important than ever for nonprofits to understand and demonstrate their effectiveness and impact. Through a series of illustrative examples and case studies, the authors present a framework to guide the selection of a "right-fit" evaluation approach. The framework introduced in this book incorporates four principles, referred to as the CART principles.

149   *Decolonizing Wealth* by Edgar Villanueva

Reviewed by Juan Olivarez, Ph.D., Grand Valley State University

Part I, "Where It Hurts," introduces the notion that it's not just the distribution of dollars in grant making that perpetuates the colonizer virus, but also where the corpus of the foundation is invested. Part II, "How to Heal," describes Seven Steps to Healing with ideas for creating a better financial and philanthropic field. The author believes that radical changes are necessary if we are to create a new paradigm of connect, relate, and belong. Reading *Decolonizing Wealth* may be uncomfortable for those who share the hurt or for those offended by Villanueva's direct accusations. However, this is a must read.

Call for Papers

Abstracts are solicited in four categories:

- **Results.** Papers in this category generally report on findings from evaluations of foundation-funded work. Papers should include a description of the theory of change (logic model, program theory), a description of the grantmaking strategy, the evaluation methodology, the results, and discussion. The discussion should focus on what has been learned both about the programmatic content and about grantmaking and other foundation roles (convening, etc.).

- **Tools.** Papers in this category should describe tools useful for foundation staff or boards. By "tool" we mean a systematic, replicable method intended for a specific purpose. For example, a protocol to assess community readiness and standardized facilitation methods would be considered tools. The actual tool should be included in the article where practical. The paper should describe the rationale for the tool, how it was developed, and available evidence of its usefulness.

- **Sector.** Papers in this category address issues that confront the philanthropic sector as whole, such as diversity, accountability, etc. These are typically empirically based; literature reviews are also considered.

- **Reflective Practice.** The reflective practice articles rely on the knowledge and experience of the authors, rather than on formal evaluation methods or designs. In these cases, it is because of their perspective about broader issues, rather than specific initiatives, that the article is valuable.

Book Reviews: *The Foundation Review* publishes reviews of relevant books. Please contact the editor to discuss submitting a review. Reviewers must be free of conflicts of interest.

Questions? Contact Teri Behrens, editor of *The Foundation Review,* with questions at behrenst@foundationreview.org or (734) 646-2874.

Thanks to our reviewers!

We'd like to thank our peer reviewers for Volume 10 of *The Foundation Review* for their time, expertise, and guidance. The peer-review process is essential in ensuring the quality of our content. Thank you for your contributions to building the field of philanthropy!

If you are interested in peer reviewing for Volume 11, send an email to Teri Behrens, Editor in Chief, at behrenst@foundationreview.org.

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2019–2021

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Established in 1992, the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy is an academic center of Grand Valley State University. We believe that strong philanthropy builds resilient and vibrant communities. That is why our mission is to help individuals and organizations understand, strengthen, and advance philanthropy.

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