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Community Navigation as a Field of Practice: Reframing Service Delivery to Meet the Needs of Communities' Marginalized Populations

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Keywords: Community navigation, community-centered approach, field building, lived experience, asset-based community development

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 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

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.

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

[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 standalone, 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[.]

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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:

- *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

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

[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.