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Investing in Community Change: An Evaluation of a Decade of Data-Driven Grantmaking

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Keywords: Neighborhood revitalization, comprehensive community development, resident driven neighborhood planning, evaluating community change initiatives, strategic philanthropy, data-driven grantmaking, placemaking

Introduction

Since 2003, the Wells Fargo Regional Foundation (WFRF) and Wells Fargo Regional Community Development Corp.'s Neighborhood Grants Program has funded the creation and implementation of comprehensive neighborhood-revitalization plans in low-income neighborhoods throughout eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey. The program's approach in each neighborhood encourages resident and stakeholder participation in the plan's creation; establishes a baseline of primary and secondary data for each initiative's evaluation; encourages long-term, coordinated, and data-driven investment from both the public and private sectors; and measures progress throughout its implementation.

In 2014, the WFRF engaged The Reinvestment Fund (TRF) and Success Measures at NeighborWorks America to jointly evaluate the impact of the foundation's grantmaking and related programs from 2003 to 2013. Key goals of this multiphase effort were to better understand the WFRF's impact in the communities it has funded as well as across the region; to learn more about grantmaking strategies and funding choices that worked best and those that encountered challenges; to determine if there are practices in the WFRF's approach to its grantmaking that can be transferred to other regions across the country; and to assess the WFRF's influence within the community development field and philanthropy, in the region and nationally.

Key Points

- The Wells Fargo Regional Foundation has a well-established continuum of grantmaking and technical-assistance programs designed to improve the quality of life for children and families living in low-income communities in eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey. The foundation's decade long focus on neighborhood revitalization has helped to shape a resident-driven, collaborative, long-term, and data-informed approach designed to make neighborhoods more attractive for large-scale investment.
- In 2014, the foundation engaged The Reinvestment Fund and Success Measures at NeighborWorks America to jointly evaluate the impact of its grantmaking and related programs from 2003 to 2013, to determine if practices in its approach could be transferred to other regions, and to assess its influence in the field. The evaluation examined lessons from 140 grants, totaling \$41.69 million, that enabled hundreds of projects in the region and leveraged \$231.5 million in direct and indirect neighborhood investment.
- Based on the findings of the evaluation, the foundation reaffirmed its mission, revised certain aspects of its Neighborhood Grants Program, and in a new strategic plan further defined and enhanced its opportunities for collaboration and shared learning within the funding community.

The evaluation examined lessons from 140 grants totaling \$41.69 million. These grants enabled hundreds of neighborhood-improvement projects in the region and leveraged \$231.5 million in direct and indirect neighborhood investment.

The foundation's decade-long focus on neighborhood revitalization through large-dollar, programmatic grants has helped to shape a grassroots approach that is now accepted by local and state funders. This resident-driven, collaborative, long-term, and data-informed approach is designed to make neighborhoods more attractive for large-scale investment.

Grant Programs and Strategic Approaches

The WFRF has a well-established continuum of grantmaking and technical-assistance programs designed to improve the quality of life for children and families living in low-income communities in its region. The foundation's decade-long focus on neighborhood revitalization through large-dollar, programmatic grants has helped to shape a grassroots approach that is now accepted by local and state funders. This resident-driven, collaborative, long-term, and data-informed approach is designed to make neighborhoods more attractive for large-scale investment. The WFRF's program consists of:

- Neighborhood planning grants, which support the creation of comprehensive, resident-driven neighborhood-revitalization plans in urban, suburban, and rural communities. These grants range from \$25,000 to \$100,000 and are disbursed over a 12- to 18-month period.
- Neighborhood implementation grants, which are available to grantees that successfully complete a strategic, resident-driven neighborhood plan. These grants range from \$100,000 to \$750,000, disbursed over five years. Grantees also receive technical assistance from TRF to map and analyze data about their target area, and from Success Measures at NeighborWorks America to plan and implement an outcome-focused evaluation of their initiatives, including measuring changes in resident satisfaction with neighborhood quality of life.
- Neighborhood implementation renewal grants, which provide grantees that are effectively implementing their plans an additional two to four years of funding with disbursements up to \$150,000 per two-year period of support to invest in their key programs. Renewal grantees receive continued technical assistance from TRF and Success Measures, and are also eligible for technical assistance from the Community Wealth Partners' Sustainability Initiative, which provides business, financial, marketing, and fundraising analysis to position these mature initiatives for longer-term success.
- Opportunity grants, which are made to select neighborhood grant recipients for unique neighborhood issues. These grants are generally \$50,000 or less and last from six to 18 months to help build the identified capacity needs of the grantee.
- Program-related investments of up to \$250,000, which are available at below-market interest rates to provide seed capital for projects within target neighborhoods that are expected to produce an income stream to support repayment within three to 10 years.

All of these neighborhood-revitalization plans are comprehensive, laying out a set of strategies designed to improve a neighborhood's housing quality and affordability, strengthen local business economies and access to employment, build neighborhood assets and cohesion, and provide services to children and families.

The resulting initiatives address a neighborhood's human, physical, and social-capital needs through

a coordinated network of service providers, overseen by a steering committee comprised of neighborhood stakeholders and residents. (See Table 1.) The WFRF provides programmatic funding to a lead organization that typically serves as the initiative's coordinating agency. In some cases, a portion of the grant is regranted to other service providers through a memorandum of understanding. In all cases, resident and stakeholder involvement is expected throughout the life of an initiative, with funding contingent upon the achievement of agreed-upon milestones and activities that are documented quarterly and reported back to the steering committee and the WFRF.

The WFRF has expanded the breadth and depth of its Neighborhood Grants Program over the evaluation period based upon experience and grantee feedback. Renewal grants were added in 2009, after it became clear that significant resources and time were needed to change the trajectory of a neighborhood. Additionally, the foundation has provided increased technical assistance focused on the use of data, evaluation, and resource development to ensure the initiatives are appropriately sized, resourced, and effective.

In selecting grantees, the WFRF has developed an underwriting process and tools for assessing the level of risk of each grant investment. The process considers the stage of the neighborhood, the strength of the collaboration among stakeholders, the fiscal and management strength of the lead organization, the types and nature of strategies included in the implementation, and the scope of the initiative in relation to the scale of the problem – the latter a measure of overall project complexity. Considering all these factors, the WFRF assigns a rating to each potential implementation grantee that represents the level of risk and complexity of the proposed initiative. Grants are made at all levels of risk, as the overall goal is to understand the nature of the risk at the outset and to manage the risk with the appropriate level of support.

TABLE 1 Types of Programming Supported by the WFRF

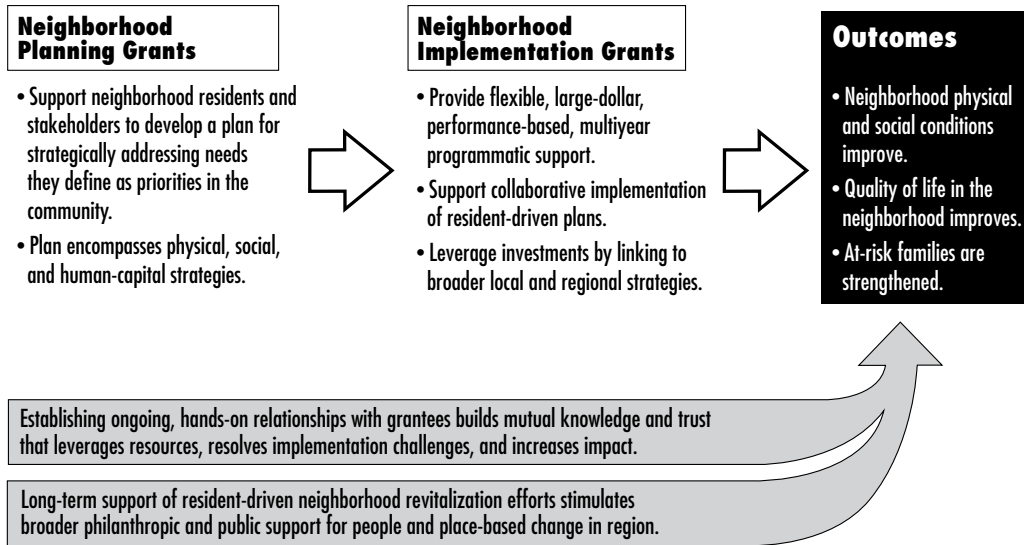
Types of Programming Supported by the WFRF
<p>Participatory Neighborhood Plans</p> <p>Affordable-Housing Development and Counseling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rental and owner-occupied units • Environmental health and energy audits • Training in home maintenance • First-time purchase assistance <p>Economic Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business associations • New business development • Job creation and training • Job placement • Closures of nuisance businesses <p>Neighborhood Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New and maintained green and recreation space • Tree planting • Demolition of blighted properties • Neighborhood beautification activities streetscape improvements • Physical improvements to homes and businesses • Support for community groups • Community marketing support • Neighborhood festivals and gatherings <p>Child and Family Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New and expanded community centers • Case management, health care, life skills and advocacy • New child care slots • Computers for community centers • School-age programming • Critical needs (e.g., food and clothing)

Theory and Methods

The WFRF's approaches are based on its underlying theory of change, which holds that the foundation's financial and technical support for resident-driven neighborhood planning, followed by implementation support for a community's highest-priority strategies, will yield measurable change in residents' quality of life and lead to a range of other benefits for low-income families and communities. (See Figure 1.) In addition, the theory posits that the investments will have field-building outcomes that include enhanced regional collaborations, communication, and networking; sharing of best practices; and strengthening the sustainability of community development organizations in the region.

FIGURE 1 WFRF Theory of Change

Wells Fargo Regional Foundation Theory of Change



Evaluators used a mixed-methods approach that included interviews, case studies, economic analysis, survey data, and administrative data to assess the contributions of the WFRF’s grantmaking over its 10-year history. Because neighborhood revitalization is influenced by the changes that occur for both the people and the place, this summative review drew on several streams of quantitative and qualitative data that, taken together, can more fully describe the outcomes of the WFRF’s grantmaking strategies. This analysis was also built on the WFRF’s significant investment in integrating monitoring and grantee/project evaluation into its business routine. Because key data were captured over the history of the grant programs, it was possible to synthesize and examine them over time, as well as draw on the reflective capacity that has been developed among grantees.

The goal of this evaluation was to assess the overall impact of the grantmaking, not to evaluate the quality of the technical assistance provided by TRF and Success Measures to grantees.

Notwithstanding that, in order to minimize the appearance of a conflict of interest, TRF and Success Measures engaged third-party interviewers with expertise in qualitative research and in the philanthropic sector to conduct the stakeholder interviews and develop the case studies. This step was taken to protect the identity of interviewees in order to elicit frank feedback. Additionally, third-party experts in econometric analysis quantified the economic impact of selected grants.

The components of the evaluation included the following data and analyses:

- *Administrative data on the grant portfolio from 2003-2013.* This analysis covered the location, programmatic focus, funding levels, grantee performance, and tangible accomplishments of 140 grants made by the WFRF. The analysis was informed by social, economic, and market data compiled and mapped for each grantee area during the planning and implementation efforts.

- *Resident quality-of-life survey data.* During the neighborhood planning process, the WFRF grantees conducted a survey to assess residents' experience and satisfaction with quality-of-life aspects, and used the baseline data to inform the plan. If funded, each organization conducted the survey again at the end of the implementation-grant cycle, comparing the random-sample survey data over time to understand changes in residents' perceptions. If the organization received a renewal grant, the survey was repeated again. This evaluation included an analysis of the quality-of-life changes seen in neighborhoods for which two rounds of survey data were available.
 - *Stakeholder and grantee interviews.* Third-party evaluators conducted interviews with a sample of 17 grantees and 28 WFRF stakeholders representing a cross-section of regional philanthropy, government, and community development representatives, as well as representatives from the WFRF board, Wells Fargo Bank, and other financial services institutions, to gauge opinions on the foundation's strategies, staff, and influence.
 - *Comparative neighborhood analysis.* Using residential real estate sales price as one measure that encompasses neighborhood quality, desirability, and demand to live in an area, an analysis comparing sale-price changes in grantees' target neighborhoods to changes in surrounding areas and the grantees' municipalities was conducted to assess change in both the physical environment and residents' perceptions of the social capital in their neighborhoods.
 - *Case studies of a sample of grantee organizations.* An outside evaluator developed in-depth case studies to assess the community and organizational context, achievements, and impacts of eight WFRF grants made in four localities. The challenges and opportunities faced while implementing these grants were highlighted to better understand trends in the data from other components of the evaluation.
- The evaluators used a mixed-methods approach that included interviews, case studies economic analysis, survey data, and administrative data to assess the contributions of the WFRF's grantmaking over its 10-year history. Because neighborhood revitalization is influenced by the changes that occur for both the people and the place, this summative review drew on several streams of quantitative and qualitative data that, taken together, can more fully describe the outcomes of the WFRF's grant-making strategies.*
- *Economic-impact analysis.* An econometric analysis of WFRF grantmaking in four localities was conducted to estimate a variety of economic impacts and expenditures that resulted from WFRF grants to three grantees and one collection of grantees working in the same community. This analysis was based on data on direct grant expenditures and grantee self-reported dollars leveraged from those grant expenditures.

Description of Grantees

Between 2003 and 2013, the WFRF awarded 140 grants totaling \$41.69 million in four program

TABLE 2 Grants: Type and Status

	Planning	Implementation	Renewal	Opportunity	Percentage
Active	4	25	13	0	30.0%
Closed	42	30	8	17	69.3%
Withdrawn	1	0	0	0	0.7%
Total	47	55	21	17	100.0%

areas: 47 planning grants (\$3.95 million),¹ 55 implementation grants (\$34.2 million), 21 renewal grants (\$3.06 million), and 17 opportunity grants (\$468,000). Of the 140 grants awarded over the 10-year period, 42 are still active. (See Table 2.)

The geographic footprint of WFRF grantmaking covers all or part of three states: Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. (See Figure 2.) Grants were concentrated in Philadelphia and in the cities of Camden, Trenton, and Newark in New Jersey. Within these areas, the data show that grants were made in communities with higher rates of concentrated poverty than the region as a whole. On average, 24 percent of families in WFRF target areas lived below the federal poverty line, compared to an average of 7.8 percent across the region.

Grants were separated into three time periods: one early in the life of the foundation, one before the recession, and one during and after the recession. Between 2003 and 2005, the WFRF awarded 19 planning grants and 16 implementation grants, for \$11.81 million. From 2006 through 2008, the WFRF awarded another 39 grants (\$14.38 million), though in this period there were more implementation grants than planning grants. Between 2009 and 2012, there were 14 planning grants, 18 implementation grants, and 21 renewal grants (which were introduced in 2009), totaling \$10.53 million. (See Table 3.) Opportunity grants were fairly evenly distributed over the three periods.

Planning grants led to subsequent implementation grants almost 78.6 percent of the time. Three of the grants that did not become implementation

¹ One planning grant was withdrawn and not included in these computations.

grants experienced performance issues during the planning period, including two that chronically underperformed against established programmatic benchmarks. Removing those, 85 percent of planning grants led to an implementation-grant award.

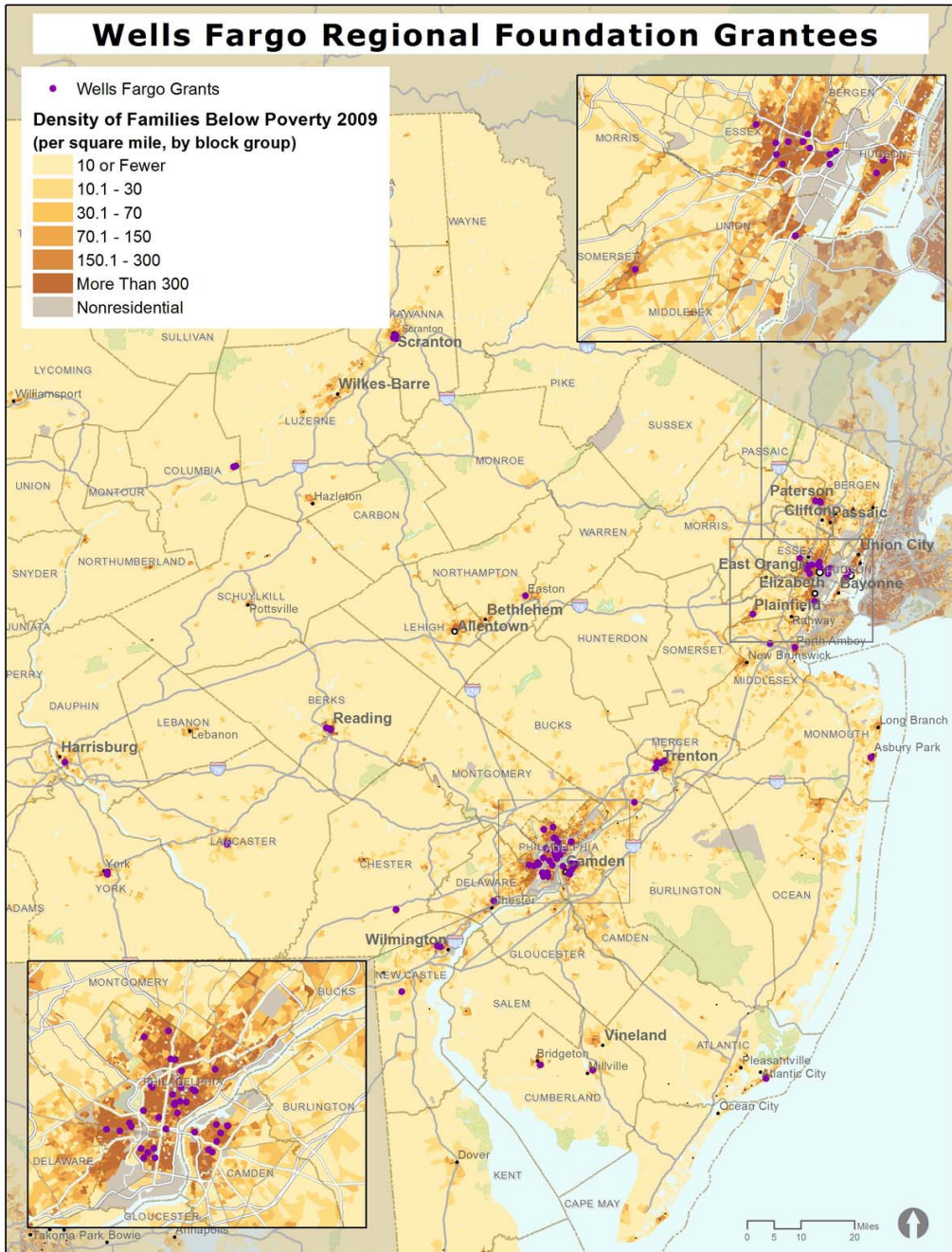
Impact on Communities and Organizations

The WFRF's grantmaking strategies identified strong organizations that led initiatives that changed the trajectory of their target areas relative to comparable areas.

WFRF implementation-grantee activities are intended to improve a place and the prospects for people living in that place in a variety of ways. One sign that this has occurred is an increase in home sale prices. In the literature,² home sale prices are considered to be a single measure that encompasses neighborhood demand, quality, and desirability (Mallach, 2008; Zielenbach, 2004; Weissbourd, Bodini, & He, 2009). Housing values generally reflect a number of neighborhood characteristics, such as distance from jobs, quality of schools, transportation options, social capital, and crime rate. As surrounding conditions improve or decline, changes are captured in the prices of nearby homes. Changes in real estate prices, therefore, indicate changes both in the physical environment of the neighborhood and in residents' perceptions of the social capital in their neighborhoods.

² See, e.g., Mallach, A. (2008). *Managing neighborhood change* (Montclair, NJ: National Housing Institute); Zielenbach, S. (2004). *Measuring the impact of community development*. Available online at <http://www.bostonfed.org/commdev/c&b/2004/fall/Measuring.pdf>; Weissbourd, R., Bodini, R., & He, M. (2009, September). *Dynamic neighborhoods: New tools for community development*. Available online at http://rw-ventures.com/publications/n_analysis.php.

FIGURE 2 WFRF Grants and Density of Families in Poverty



There are many ways to understand whether grantee activities were associated with an increase in local sale prices. For this analysis, practical and data considerations necessitated an approach that

assumes that the impact of grantees' activities would be strongest in or very near to where the activities are focused and would weaken as the distance from the activities increased.

TABLE 3 Grant Type by Time Period of Grant Approval

	Planning	Implementation	Renewal	Opportunity	Percentage
2003-2005	19	16	0	7	30.0%
2006-2008	14	21	0	4	27.9%
2009-2012	14	18	21	6	42.1%
Total	47	55	21	17	100.0%

TABLE 4 Comparative Performance of WFRF Grantees

	Grant Life	Extended Period
Beat Comparison Area	60.0%	54.5%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	40.0%	45.5%
Total number	35	22

TABLE 5 Neighborhood Sales-Price Change Trajectory by Grantee Performance Category

	No Performance Problem	Performance Problem
Beat Comparison Area	71.4%	42.9%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	28.6%	57.1%
Total number	21	14

TABLE 6 Neighborhood Sales-Price Change Trajectory by Grantee Chronic-Performance Category

	No Chronic Performance Problem	Chronic Performance Problem
Beat Comparison Area	68.0%	40.0%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	32.0%	60.0%
Total number	25	10

TABLE 7 Neighborhood Sales-Price Change Trajectory by Grantee-Performance Category (Extended Time Period)

	No Performance Problem	Performance Problem
Beat Comparison Area	69.2%	33.3%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	30.8%	66.7%
Total number	13	9

TABLE 8 Neighborhood Sales-Price Change Trajectory by Grantee Chronic-Performance Category (extended Time Period)

	No Chronic Performance Problem	Chronic Performance Problem
Beat Comparison Area	66.7%	28.5%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	33.3%	71.4%
Total number	15	7

For grantees, the quarter-mile area around their footprint serves as the comparison neighborhood. If sale prices in the grantees' target neighborhoods increased relative to the comparison areas (or did not decrease as much in the target area compared to a declining comparison area), that increase can reasonably be attributed to the grantee intervention and would be considered positive performance. Negative performance would be indicated by price changes in the target area that either did not increase as much as, or decreased more than, the comparison areas.

Grantee performance relative to the comparison areas was examined over two periods: over the life of the grant and over an extended period, which includes two years after grant activities concluded. The rationale for examining this extended period is to explore the sustainability of changes in the grantees' neighborhoods.

Home Sale-Price Performance

Overall, a majority of grantees – 60 percent – measurably improved home sale prices in their neighborhoods relative to comparison neighborhoods over the life of their grant. Over the period that extends two years beyond the conclusion of the WFRF implementation grant, 54.5 percent of grantees performed better than their comparison area.³ (See Table 4.)

Grantee agreements include milestones and activities for measuring progress in meeting overall project goals, and the payment of grant installments is contingent on performance.⁴ Grantees and the WFRF develop the work plan together and there is extraordinary focus on achieving the milestones and goals. Foundation staff expends considerable effort engaging with grantees to resolve issues that could ultimately affect overall

Foundation staff expends considerable effort engaging with grantees to resolve issues that could ultimately affect overall performance. In some instances as economic conditions changed, however, foundation staff adjusted goals set out in the original agreement to reflect new conditions.

performance. In some instances as economic conditions changed, however, foundation staff adjusted goals set out in the original agreement to reflect new conditions.

Grantees that consistently met the goals and milestones for grant activities had arguably greater influence on sale prices in their communities than grantees that experienced performance issues. Fully 71.4 percent of grantees that had no performance issues throughout the life of their grant showed better changes in sale price, compared to 42.9 percent for those grantees with some performance problems. (See Table 5.)

Among grantees deemed to have chronic performance problems, only 40 percent showed better sale-price changes in their target areas than in comparison areas. Conversely, 68 percent of grantees without chronic performance problems were able to achieve better sale-price changes in their target areas than occurred in comparison areas. (See Table 6.)

Over the extended period, 69.2 percent of grantees with no performance problems, compared to 33.3 percent of those with performance problems, achieved better sale-price change in their target

³ Because some of the grantees' implementation grants concluded less than two years prior to the date of the analysis, they are not included in analysis of the extended time period. Twenty-two of the 35 examined grantees are analyzed over the extended time frame.

⁴ Among the 55 implementation grants, 17 (30.9 percent) were off target at least one quarter and 11 (20 percent) were chronic underperformers. Only two (9.5 percent) of the 21 renewal grants were off target at least once over the course of the grant period, and both chronically underperformed.

Social projects can be implemented more quickly than physical projects, at a lower cost, and a correspondingly lower risk. Further, the impact from social projects may be more immediate. Physical development takes longer, but once completed the benefits are more long term. Community development work that addresses physical blight and human services is a more comprehensive approach; the evidence here suggests that this approach can have a longer-term impact on the community.

areas than in comparison areas. Only 28.6 percent of grantees with chronic performance issues saw relative positive outcomes, compared to 66.7 percent of grantees with no such performance issues. (See Table 7 and Table 8.)

Type of Activity

The nature of the grantees' activities, described as social or physical, does influence the short- and longer-term impacts on local property markets. Examples of social strategies include programming focused on education, human-service case management, job training, and child care; physical strategies can include new housing and housing maintenance, investments in public spaces such as parks and community centers, transportation, and commercial-area revitalization and business de-

velopment. The impact on local property markets is again connected to the ability of the grantee to perform its grant obligations according to expectations. Grantees with a more focused social strategy tended to have a greater impact on local property markets than those with a mixed social and physical strategy over the life of the grant (73.3 percent versus 50 percent). (See Table 9.)

Over the extended period, however, the pattern reverses. Projects that had a mixed strategy were substantially more likely to positively impact their local property markets than those more focused on social activities (62.5 percent versus 33.3 percent). (See Table 10.)

The connection to performance is especially pronounced among those projects that had a mixed set of activities. During the grant life, the percentage of grantees with a mixed set of activities positively influencing their local markets dropped from 50 percent to 22.2 percent if there were performance issues. Conversely, 87.5 percent of grantees with mixed strategies, but without performance issues, positively impacted their local property markets. (See Table 11 and Table 12.)

These patterns in the data can be explained by considering the differences between social and physical initiatives. Social projects can be implemented more quickly than physical projects, at a lower cost, and a correspondingly lower risk. Further, the impact from social projects may be more immediate. Physical development takes longer, but once completed the benefits are more long term. Community development work that addresses physical blight and human services is a more comprehensive approach; the evidence here suggests that this approach can have a longer-term impact on the community. The choice of physical and social strategies is also one where risk is an important factor; social projects are more likely to be completed, but when physical projects are completed the rewards are greater, again pointing to the benefits of mixed strategy.

Size of the Grantee Focus Area

There are times when WFRF staff counsel grantees to define smaller, more manageable focus

TABLE 9 Neighborhood Sales-Price Trajectory by Strategy Grantees

	Physical and Social	Social
Beat Comparison Area	50.0%	73.3%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	50.0%	26.7%
Total number	20	15

TABLE 10 Neighborhood Sales-Price Trajectory by Strategy for Grantees With Performance Issues

	Physical and Social	Social
Beat Comparison Area	22.2%	80.0%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	77.8%	20.0%
Total number	9	5

TABLE 11 Neighborhood Sales-Price Trajectory by Strategy Grantees (Extended Time Period)

	Physical and Social	Social
Beat Comparison Area	62.5%	33.3%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	37.5%	66.7%
Total number	16	6

TABLE 12 Neighborhood Sales-Price Trajectory by Strategy for Grantees Without Performance Issues (Extended Time Period)

	Physical and Social	Social
Beat Comparison Area	87.5%	40.0%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	12.5%	60.0%
Total number	8	5

TABLE 13 Neighborhood Sales-Price Trajectory by Size of Target Neighborhood

	Smaller Focus Area	Larger Focus Area
Beat Comparison Area	77.8%	41.2%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	22.2%	58.8%
Total number	18	17

areas for their grant-related activities. The data suggest this is sound advice. Among grantees with smaller focus areas, 77.8 percent experienced more advantageous sale-price changes than their comparison areas, compared to 41.2 percent of grantees with larger focus areas. (See Table 13.)

Initial Project Risk

Grantees are assessed by the WFRF on the level of risk they and their projects represent at the beginning of the grant period. The data show that grantees with a high initial project risk compared to those with lower risk do about the same against

their comparison areas – 64.3 percent and 57.1 percent, respectively, experience sale-price changes more advantageous than their comparison areas. Over the extended period, however, 66.7 percent of grantees initially assessed to be high risk, compared to 46.2 percent of low-risk grantees, achieved advantageous results.

This finding is consistent with the discussion about the payoffs from social and physical strategies, and suggests that the WFRF's willingness to take risk, and to work closely with grantees to meet their obligations, can produce positive,

TABLE 14 Neighborhood Sales-Price Trajectory by Initial Project Risk

	High Project Risk	Low Project Risk
Beat Comparison Area	64.3%	57.1%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	35.7%	42.9%
Total number	14	21

TABLE 15 Neighborhood Sales Price Change Trajectory by Initial Project Risk Extended Time Period

	High Project Risk	Low Project Risk
Beat Comparison Area	66.7%	46.2%
Did Not Beat Comparison Area	33.3%	53.8%
Total number	9	13

sustainable results. Stated differently, grantee risk that is well monitored and supported by foundation staff can yield long-term, positive community change. (See Table 14 and Table 15.)

Additional impacts on communities receiving WFRF funding and technical assistance include dramatic visual changes; increased resident engagement, empowerment, and pride; and positive changes in quality-of-life indicators.

In addition to quantifying the community economic impacts, the foundation sought to understand community perceptions of the impacts of its grant support through key informant interviews with grantees and an analysis of resident survey data.

Executive directors of grantee organizations provided specific examples of both physical and social changes, including the removal of abandoned structures, the transformation of a drug-infested neighborhood park into a home for Little League baseball, reclaiming an abandoned manufacturing site into a community park, and creating “solid homeownership zones” through new construction that has reduced crime in the immediate area.

Beyond the physical improvements is a deeper change that some grantees described in the fabric of the community, including a greater sense of pride, engagement, and value that comes from what one executive director described as “feeling like a part of a vibrant community and not a

forgotten zone.” Grantees credited the resident-driven planning approach that involves the entire community in the assessment and determination of revitalization as critical to such deeper community change.

Consistent with the WFRF’s emphasis on both resident engagement and evaluation, all grantees are required to conduct a resident survey at two key points: during the neighborhood planning process and toward the end of the implementation period.

Beginning in 2006, grantees transitioned from creating their own surveys to using a common survey with technical assistance from Success Measures. The survey incorporates measures of overall satisfaction, community connectedness, and quality-of-life indicators, such as access to transportation, the quality of public services, access to employment centers, housing affordability and conditions, neighbor friendliness, cleanliness, feelings of safety, and school quality.⁵ Grantees are required to conduct surveys door to door, following a household-level random-sampling methodology, and encouraged to engage local residents as data collectors, thereby increasing the value of the community- and capacity-building effort.

Twelve organizations completed both “pre” (baseline) and “post” (follow-up) resident-satisfaction surveys as of July 2013; since then, an additional

⁵ Respondents were asked to rate each quality-of-life indicator on a five-point scale ranging from “very good” to “very poor.”

TABLE 16 Change in Respondent Ratings of Key Aspects of Neighborhood Quality of Life

Grantee	Access to Public Transportation	Public Services	Access to Employment Centers	Housing Affordability	Friendliness	Cleanliness	Physical Condition of Homes	Safety	Schools
Org. 1	Up*	Up*	Up*	Same	Same	Up*	Up*	Up*	Up
Org. 14	Same	Up***	Up***	Up***	Up***	Up***	Up***	Up***	N.A.
Org. 15	Same	Up***	Up***	Up***	Up***	Up***	Up***	Up***	N.A.
Org. 2	Up*	Up*	Same	Up	Up*	Same	Same	Up*	Up*
Org. 13	Up***	Up***	Up***	Same	Up***	Up**	Same	Up***	N.A.
Org. 3	Up	N.A.	Up*	Up*	Down*	Up*	Up*	Up*	N.A.
Org. 4	Down	Up*	Up*	Up*	Same	Up*	Same	Up*	N.A.
Org. 5	Up*	Up*	Down*	Up*	Up*	Same	Same	Down*	N.A.
Org. 16	Same	Same	Same	Down	Same	Up	Same	Same	N.A.
Org. 6	Up	Down	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	Down	N.A.
Org. 7	Same	Same	Same	Same	Up*	Down*	Same	Down*	Down*
Org. 20	Down***	Down***	Up***	Same	Down***	Same	Same	Down	N.A.
Org. 8	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	N.A.
Org. 9	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	Down*	Same	Same	Down
Org. 18	Same	Down	Same	Same	Same	Same	Down***	Same	Same
Org. 17	Same	Down**	Same	Same	Down**	Same	Same	Same	N.A.
Org. 10	Same	Down	Same	Down	Down	Same	Down	Down	N.A.
Org. 19	Same	Down	Same	Down	Down	Same	Down	Down	N.A.
Org. 11	Same	Down	Same	Down	Down	Down	Down	Down	N.A.
Org. 12	Down	Down	Down	Same	Down	Down	Down	Down	N.A.
Org. 21	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	Up	N.A.	N.A.

Note: The trend is described as “up” if the organization saw a statistically significant increase in mean score to the question (significance level noted with asterisks), or if the organization saw an increase of more than 10 percentage points in the respondents providing a positive answer to the survey question (top two levels of the scale). The trend is described as “same” if the change was less than 10 percentage points and was not statistically significant. The trend is described as “down” if the organization saw a statistically significant decrease in mean score to the question, or if there was a decrease of more than 10 percentage points in the respondents providing a positive answer to the survey question. Tests of significance were not conducted for organizations with a wording change in a survey question.

nine organizations completed follow-up surveys. The survey asks respondents whether they would recommend the neighborhood to others as a good place to live. In the follow-up, 10 of the 21 organizations found that more than 50 percent of respondents would recommend the neighborhood. Of the 21 organizations, six saw statistically significant improvements in this measure of their target neighborhoods. Grantee organizations view these results as positive, particularly where the increases are significant, given that it demonstrates a majority of residents view the neighborhood

as one of choice, which is an asset in community building.

Seven organizations saw positive changes in a majority of quality-of-life areas that respondents rated. (See Table 16.) Equally noteworthy is that seven other organizations reported no decline over time – a positive result for many groups since these surveys were conducted in the midst of the recession, when many communities experienced the consequences of cuts in local government spending on public services.

Context is important in understanding and explaining survey results, including changes over time; for example, one group conducted the follow-up survey shortly after the neighborhood experienced a number of drive-by shootings and were delighted that perceptions of neighborhood safety had not changed compared to the baseline. Looking at the results on specific questions across a portfolio of grantees provides only a part of the picture, one that becomes much more meaningful to individual grantees at the place-based level when context and specific initiatives are considered.

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Economic Impact

The WFRF's investment produced a substantial economic impact based on an analysis in selected communities.

One goal of the WFRF's grantmaking strategies is to make neighborhoods more attractive for large-scale investment. As part of the larger evaluation effort, the WFRF commissioned an independent econometric analysis for four subareas within the foundation's footprint: the Chinatown neighborhood of Philadelphia; the cities of Camden and Asbury Park, N.J.; and the Elizabethport neighborhood of Elizabeth, N.J. For every dollar of direct investment by the WFRF, more than seven dollars were expended in the examined grantees' counties (\$231.5 million in total output of leveraged funds from \$30.5 million in direct output). The leverage in the grantees' neighborhoods was about five dollars spent for each dollar invested (\$146.2 million in total output of leveraged funds from \$30.5 million in direct output). These expenditures sustained 2,150 jobs, with 69 percent of jobs in the neighborhoods themselves, and resulted in \$112 million in earnings in the grantees' counties and \$81 million in earnings in the grantees' neighborhoods.⁶ (See Table 17 and Table 18.) The sidebar describes one example where WFRF grantees in Camden, N.J., were able to achieve significant leverage to expand their revitalization activities.

Organizational Impact

Foundation support has strengthened the organizational, planning, programmatic, evaluation, and financial capacity of grantee organizations, as evidenced by the ability to undertake and sustain complex revitalization initiatives.

According to executive directors who were interviewed, the WFRF grant programs have

⁶ WFRF commissioned Econsult Solutions Inc. (ESI) to estimate leverage and economic impact of its granting on a sample of grantees. ESI collects data on direct grant expenditures and grantee self-reported dollars leveraged from grantees on their grant expenditures, and with that creates estimates of further indirect and induced expenditures, total employment, and total earnings resulting from the direct grant expenditures at both the county and ZIP code levels. Direct expenditures were used as inputs into a Regional Input-Output Modeling System, customized by ESI, which yields an estimate of the total expenditure's effect on the regional economy.

TABLE 17 Economic Impact of WFRF Grants on Studied Geographies

Economic Impact of Wells Fargo Grants	Within the County Economy	Within the Neighborhood in Which Organization Operates (Zip Code)
Direct Output (\$M)	\$30.20	\$30.20
Indirect & Induced Output (\$M)	\$24.10	\$0.70
Total Output (\$M)	\$54.30	\$30.90
Total Employment (Jobs)	765	607
Total Earnings (\$M)	\$26.70	\$19.00

TABLE 18 Economic Impact of Leveraged Funds on Studied Geographies

Economic Impact of Leveraged Funds	Within the County Economy	Within the Neighborhood in Which Organization Operates (Zip Code)
Direct Output (\$M)	\$140.70	\$140.70
Indirect & Induced Output (\$M)	\$90.80	\$5.50
Total Output (\$M)	\$231.50	\$146.20
Total Employment (Jobs)	2,150	1,492
Total Earnings (\$M)	\$112.00	\$81.00

strengthened grantees' operations and metrics, organizational stability, capacity, reputation and ability to attract partners, and approach to planning in the neighborhoods and communities they serve. This has resulted from various elements of the program, including the continuum of grants, a culture of learning and evaluation, due diligence in selection and assessment, and collaboration with a variety of community organizations. All grantees that were interviewed described the grant experience as a rigorous one with a high degree of accountability, but also with substantial opportunities for learning and professional development. Further, there was significant agreement among stakeholders that the WFRF has been a catalyst in communities, helping organizations and neighborhoods become more "investment ready." Stakeholders who were interviewed described foundation grantees as more confident in their skills and approach, more organized, and more certain of future goals and strategies as a result of the grant experience.

The planning process sets a tone that forces an organization to be realistic about capacity for the implementation; grantees welcomed this as it keeps them focused on their objectives and out-

comes. In addition, grantees stated that the foundation's performance-based agreement creates accountability throughout the life of the grant, which is much more rigorous than other funders that typically do not employ performance-based payments.

For some grantee organizations, the comprehensive planning process and collaboration with other community agencies expanded the organization's approach to its work from an emphasis on housing to a broader economic development perspective. Examples include the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corp.'s identification of the need for more services for children and youth, and the development of social enterprises in Camden and Asbury Park, N.J. Camden grantees have also developed areas of redevelopment expertise that have been leveraged to assist other community development organizations working in the community.

Grantmaking Strategies and Funding Choices

The foundation's set of tools used for due diligence in grant allocation and for assessing the likelihood that a grantee or project could experi-

TABLE 19 Grantee Performance by Initial Project-Risk Rating

	Ever Off	Chronic
High	42.9%	28.6%
Medium High	33.3%	28.6%
Medium	33.3%	13.3%
Medium Low	20.0%	10.0%
Total	17	11

ence difficulty meeting project goals, outputs, and milestones are reasonably predictive of performance.

As part of the due diligence preceding a grant allocation, WFRF staff assesses the risk of each potential project. The subsequent performance of grants shows that staff created a gauge of program risk that is reasonably predictive of performance. For example, more than 40 percent of grantees with a “high” initial project-risk rating had a performance issue, compared to 20 percent of grantees with a “medium low” (the lowest) initial rating. Similarly, every grantee with “weak” financial capacity had a performance issue; 80 percent of these grantees had chronic problems, compared to approximately 23 percent of grantees with “strong” financial capacity and none with an “exceptional” financial capacity. (See Table 19 and Table 20.)

Each quarter, foundation staff assesses every grant on its progress toward achieving the goals established at the beginning of the grant period and assigns a performance rating.⁷ Overall, 82 percent of WFRF grants performed close to expectations over the life of the grant. Those most likely to underperform or chronically underperform were implementation grants, especially those with a

⁷ In each quarter, grants were given ratings of “on target,” “vulnerable,” “off target,” “improving - off target,” or “unsatisfactory.” In this initial analysis, the “off target,” “improving - off target,” and “unsatisfactory” categories were combined into a single indicator of underperformance. Grants with at least one quarter of underperformance were designated “ever off target.” Renewal grants that underperformed for at least two quarters and implementation grants that underperformed for at least four quarters were given the designation “chronic underperformance.”

TABLE 20 Grantee Performance by Financial-Capacity Rating

	Ever Off	Chronic
Exceptional	0.0%	0.0%
Strong	22.7%	13.6%
Acceptable	29.2%	16.7%
Weak	100.0%	80.0%
Total	17	11

greater emphasis on physical projects. Grants to collaborations of organizations were more likely to have performance issues than grants to individual organizations. (See Table 21.)

Grantee performance was not immune to the recession. In the first quarter of 2009, 17.6 percent of active grants were off target, the largest share of grants off target at any point from 2005-2012. The number of off-target grantees has generally declined in the four and a half years since the recession began.

A long-term, comprehensive approach to investment, including the continuum of grants, an emphasis on relationships, and investment in capacity, recognizes that meaningful change takes time to achieve and provides budget stability for grantees.

The foundation’s long-term commitment to grantees is reflected in its continuum of grant opportunities and in its approach to grantee relationships. Stakeholders and grantees cited the strength, sophistication, technical expertise, and respect shown by WFRF staff as a core competency leading to a strong degree of trust with its community partners, a “hands on” approach, and a consistency of support that has advanced momentum.

The continuum of grants (opportunity, planning, implementation, and renewals) demonstrates a long-term commitment to the work of the organization, and grantees say it allows them to make a more substantial impact in their neighborhoods. The process is seamless – that is, grantees are able

TABLE 21 Underperformance by Grant Type

	Planning		Implementation		Renewal	
No Issue	44	93.6%	38	69.1%	19	90.5%
Ever Off	4	8.5%	17	30.9%	2	9.5%
Chronic	3	6.4%	11	20.0%	2	9.5%
Total	47	100.0%	55	100.0%	21	100.0%

to move quickly from planning to implementation and the opportunity for renewal recognizes that change is a long-term process.

Grantees say that the continuum of grants is one of the most important aspects of the grant program because it gives them budget stability, enables the hiring and retention of high-quality staff, aids in leverage, and allows the organization to focus on doing the work. They say the approach also “speaks volumes” to residents and other stakeholders about the foundation’s commitment to the neighborhood, helping to leverage additional funding.

Replicable Practices

Grantees and stakeholders believe that the strength of WFRF’s approach to grantmaking for neighborhood revitalization lies in a combination of strategies and practices:

- *Resident-driven neighborhood planning.* Grantees and stakeholders held that the WFRF’s approach to neighborhood planning, with its deep resident involvement, is distinctive and provides important information for understanding resident needs and priorities, and builds support and engagement for implementation activities and programs among residents, partners, and other stakeholders.
- *A culture of evaluation and learning.* The WFRF’s commitment to learning is evidenced by a culture of evaluation, emphasis on the learning organization, and an annual meeting of grantees – seen as unique among funders regionally as a venue for sharing of best practices and peer learning. Grantees and stakeholders strongly agreed that the WFRF is unique in supporting

and making evaluation a key component of the funding package. As one stakeholder observed, the “WFRF takes evaluation very seriously. ... Many other foundations are still talking about it, but haven’t done a good job at implementation. ... [the] WFRF was a trailblazer.” Grantees and stakeholders believe that the package of evaluation tools and data support provided is of great value; the emphasis on outcomes helps grantees demonstrate success to stakeholders and potential funders.

- *The value of engaging grantees in evaluating neighborhood outcomes.* Grantees value the community-building benefits that result from the WFRF’s requirement that they conduct a resident-satisfaction survey. The survey process itself, especially when grantees use neighborhood residents as volunteer data collectors, can become a community-building effort, which increases the strength of the organization’s relationship to the community and lays the groundwork for more effective implementation and community buy-in. In addition, grantees use the survey data to gain insight into residents’ perceptions and concerns about the community, which, in turn, can guide the implementation process, making it more responsive to neighborhood needs. Organizations also use the survey results in fundraising and neighborhood marketing purposes. Finally, grantees reported that data about changes in neighborhood quality of life can be motivating to staff and stakeholders.
- *Emphasis on collaboration.* Interviewees report that collaboration is an important strategy used by WFRF in working with grantees, public and private funders, and other stakeholders.

In addition to improving physical conditions and quality of life in communities and strengthening families, the foundation believes it is also important to move the field in a direction that supports evidence-based, resident-engaged, people- and place-based change in communities. Interviews with grantees and key informants in regional philanthropy, community development, government, and financial institutions provide evidence that this is occurring.

Collaboration has worked well in leveraging organizational strengths, bringing a broader array of resources and expertise to bear in grantee neighborhoods, and increasing the capacity of community-based organizations. Within the WFRF's portfolio, the most structured collaborations involve several partners funded through the implementation grant for specific activities. This approach expands the ability to address human, social, and economic needs by drawing on the expertise and connections of capable organizations working in the community. Each organization does what it does best. Lead organizations use different processes for managing the collaboration and holding partners accountable for completing milestones and outcomes. Grantees say that the reporting and accountability requirements set the tone for a successful collaboration.

Influence Within Community Development and Philanthropy

In addition to improving physical conditions and quality of life in communities and strengthening families, the foundation believes it is also important to move the field in a direction that supports evidence-based, resident-engaged, people- and place-based change in communities. Interviews with grantees and key informants in regional philanthropy, community development, government, and financial institutions provide evidence that this is occurring.

The WFRF has built a constituency for resident-driven neighborhood planning in the region, according to stakeholders and grantees. Government officials, funders, and grantees report that the foundation is known regionally for its resident engagement and data-driven approach to neighborhood change; however, it remains one of the few private funders focused solely on neighborhood-based revitalization within its region. Camden, N.J., is an example of the WFRF's involvement in the implementation of a resident-driven planning philosophy. While there are many factors and entities that influenced the direction of development in Camden, the presence of the foundation as a player was significant in shaping an approach that emphasizes collaboration and resident involvement.

WFRF is a trusted partner of grantees, public agencies, philanthropy, and other nonprofits within the region and its work has enhanced regional collaborations, communication and networking, and sharing of best practices, and strengthened the sustainability of community development organizations in the region. Interviewees uniformly report that the foundation has a well-earned, very positive reputation within philanthropy and has influenced public-sector community development policy and funding in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Its collaborative efforts with other foundations and corporate philanthropies in the region productively advance these issues. Stakeholders report that one of the foundation's strengths is its ability to influence private and public funders. Its approach to neighborhood revitalization is well

recognized among public and private funders and other stakeholders in the region, an indication that it is communicating the brand and practicing the values that it represents.

The foundation also has begun to build a national profile within philanthropy for its sustained focus on neighborhood revitalization and both the collaborative approaches and evidence-based models it employs. Stakeholders offered numerous strategies for expanding the influence of the foundation, including more support for peer learning (e.g., its annual convening), with increased emphasis on resource leveraging and appealing to other funders with distinct but aligned programmatic interests or commitment to particular populations. Public sector, community, and philanthropic stakeholders also noted that the foundation has opportunities to engage more broadly and deeply with the public sector, observing that the flexibility of its resources provides the ability to exert more influence as a funder.

A Decade of Grantmaking: Learnings and Observations

Reflecting on both the successes and failures of the WFRF's Neighborhood Grants Program, including the results of this evaluation and the collective observations and experience of the foundation over a decade of grantmaking, suggests that a neighborhood's ability to implement a comprehensive revitalization plan relies heavily upon the following factors:

- *Organizational capacity.* Lead organizations were more likely to be successful if they had strong fiscal management and leadership and the capacity to raise funds, provide back office support, manage cash flow, assemble and finance physical-development projects, and maintain strong, trusting relationships with residents. Conversely, initiatives led by organizations that lacked these capacities were more likely to stall prior to full implementation.
- *Commitment to place-based work.* Lead organizations that had a high level of commitment to place-based work across their programs were more successful than human-services agencies

Lead organizations that had a high level of commitment to place-based work across their programs were more successful than human-services agencies or other entities with another primary focus, such as education or youth. In a period of diminishing resources, place-based organizations remained committed to working within the target neighborhood, while service or advocacy organizations often shifted focus to their broader mission.

or other entities with another primary focus, such as education or youth. In a period of diminishing resources, place-based organizations remained committed to working within the target neighborhood, while service or advocacy organizations often shifted focus to their broader mission.

- *Stakeholder experience to gain local political will.* In implementing a collaborative community redevelopment initiative, stakeholder groups that included individuals either respected or listened to by local politicians were more successful at moving projects or ideas forward.
- *Leadership commitment and flexibility.* Leadership's ability to remain true to the plan's goals, yet flexible in delivery, was key. A focused, yet nimble, approach allowed some initiatives to capitalize on changing market dynamics or respond to adverse market conditions. Projects

By starting with the basics and engaging data and evaluation partners to support its grantees from the beginning of its initiatives, the WFRF has been able to lay out and sustain an analytic and evaluative approach that has provided valuable, actionable data for its board, staff, grantees, and partners.

with a diverse set of activities allowed organizations to be more flexible in the face of an impediment or change in context. The foundation's willingness to amend milestones and activities to achieve goals based upon reasonable assumptions encouraged this practice.

- *Adequate staff resources for plan implementation.* Dedicated staff was essential to managing the stakeholder group toward a shared vision and keeping the initiative moving forward cohesively even as things changed. Successful initiatives were more able to maintain key staff over the life of an initiative. The foundation also encourages retention through support of leadership development.
- *Community readiness and engagement.* Community readiness cannot be underestimated. Aspects of this include positive relationships among stakeholders, residents, and local government; agreement about revitalization priorities within a target neighborhood as well as consensus on the boundaries for the initiative; and a willingness to work together on a shared vision.
- *Building toward implementation from the planning stage.* Setting realistic timetables and being

transparent about them is critical for residents to understand the length and complexity of a revitalization effort. Equally important is developing a shared framework from which stakeholders and residents can collectively assess progress. In addition, successful initiatives build in early visible, yet doable, projects to provide evidence that change is possible. This is especially helpful where redevelopment work is needed for larger physical projects. Finally, it is important to develop strategies that are feasible and appropriate given the neighborhood context, building upon market strength and assets.

Conclusion

The WFRF's incremental investments to ensure that both its grantmaking programs and its grantees' strategies were grounded in relevant context and performance and outcome data have allowed the foundation to reflect and take action at several key points in its history. The evaluation described in this article was the largest and deepest of these reflective cycles and has allowed the WFRF to put the results to immediate use in refining its strategic directions and grant programs. In terms of applicable models for other foundations, it is important to note that the WFRF is a relatively small foundation, without a large budget or staff for evaluation. However, by starting with the basics and engaging data and evaluation partners to support its grantees from the beginning of its initiatives, the WFRF has been able to lay out and sustain an analytic and evaluative approach that has provided valuable, actionable data for its board, staff, grantees, and partners.

Based on the findings of the evaluation of the Neighborhood Grants Program, the WFRF board and staff reaffirmed the foundation's mission to improve the lives of children and families within the region's low-income communities by supporting the creation and implementation of comprehensive neighborhood-revitalization plans. The board also approved revisions to the WFRF's Neighborhood Grants Program that provide additional support for the neighborhood planning process, additional financial and technical support to lead agencies of formal collaboratives, and larger

and longer-duration implementation and renewal grants. However, due diligence will be heightened to ensure readiness of both the organization and place before the foundation will invest in an initiative, and will likely result in fewer funded initiatives. Through these changes, organizations successfully implementing neighborhood-revitalization initiatives will be eligible for up to 10 years of programmatic support at implementation and renewal funding levels that range from a total of \$1.25 million for single organizations to \$2.1 million for formal, multipartner collaboratives. The WFRF's new strategic plan also further defines and enhances its opportunities for collaboration and shared learning within the funding community. The foundation also hopes that by staying the course through this approach it will contribute to further understanding of what is needed to create real and lasting neighborhood change in the communities in its region.

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