

Change That Abides: A Retrospective Look at Five Community and Family Strengthening Projects, and Their Enduring Results

Center for Youth and Communities

When my community-change initiative was over and the dust settled, it:

- Worked very well, according to the funder's plan, thank you
- Didn't Work (oops)
- Worked but it took more time and went in different ways than envisioned.

Thank goodness everyone hung in there!

Brandeis University





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The Center for Youth and Communities

Established in 1983, the Center for Youth and Communities at Brandeis University's Heller Graduate School is one of the nation's leading research, professional development, and policy organizations in the broad areas of youth, workforce, and community development. It resides in the University's new Institute for Sustainable Development.

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Ralph Smith and Miriam Shark conceptualized this project, suggesting to the lead author that there might be real value in "looking back" to see what philanthropic initiatives have produced in communities. They provided guidance throughout the process and were tough yet fair readers of drafts of the original report and this synthesis. We thank them both for dreaming up the study and selecting us to carry it out. Most importantly, they gave us the flexibility to discover the unexpected.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Chapter One

Introduction and Overview pg 1
 Relevance of the Study 2
 An Overview of the Findings 4
 The Five Sites. 4

Chapter Two

**Cultivate “Ripeness” for Change and
Seeking Opportunities to Enhance Social Capital pg 7**
 Promoting Community Ownership 9
 Developing Leaders and Empowering Communities 10
 Collaborating Leads to Civic Engagement. 13
 Assessing Increases in Social Capital 15

Chapter Three

Make a Commitment to the Long Term pg 17
 Flexibility and Respectful Responsibility Over the Long Run. 20

Chapter Four

Conclusion: Searching for Patterns in “Change That Abides” . pg 22

Chapter Five

Epilogue pg 25

*Each has its own
experience and
legacy – its own
change that abides.*

As foundations and public funders experiment with different social change models, especially at the community level, they are searching – for the right partners, the right theories, the right interventions, the right phasing, and the right effects. You would think that evaluation would help in this search. Yet the typical funded evaluation ends just about when the grant does and tends to concentrate on the experiment as a formalized process. Consequently, the “rightness” of the project’s efforts is often not determined because not enough time has occurred between initiative conception and the conclusion of outside support and evaluation.

Rarely does a funder support a look at what happens in the years after a grant ends. With a long-term view we can study the persistence of direct effects, the emergence of indirect effects, and changes in site characteristics over time. Do initiatives take off in new directions? Looking back, what lessons can we learn about effective, large-scale, comprehensive community change, alterations that might be highly significant but unintended? A retrospective look seems likely to yield insights about long-term success, identify conditions that give rise to change that abides, and – by a kind of time travel triangulation – reinforce or challenge lessons learned elsewhere.

Perhaps most importantly, it enables us to document what Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney called “the onset of possibility.” Heaney said that while a word or phrase may inspire a poem, the process of crafting poetry more commonly involves a subtle, yet almost palpable, recognition of the onset of possibility. So too with complex and highly nuanced community change: how can funders, intermediary organizations in the assisting business, community organizations, bureaucrats and government remain vigilant to promising opportunities stemming from hints of the “onset of possibilities?” The best way to begin to answer this question is to look back.

This report discusses such a retrospective study and the recognition of possibilities that would have gone undetected with a look at community change only in the short-run. An open-ended exploration of planned and unplanned long-term outcomes, it was conducted a decade or so after a series of projects’ initial funding and at least a few years after funding ended for the initiatives reviewed. The study was not an in-depth, quantitative evaluation, analyzing the achievement of goals that evaluators defined a priori. Instead, it traces qualitatively the history and evolution of three very different kinds of foundation grants in five very different urban settings – Boston, Dayton, Little Rock, Alameda County/Oakland, and Savannah. All five of the projects aimed to foster new, comprehensive change strategies; all five did so, to varying extents. All five aimed to build the communities’ capacity to produce enduring results; again, all five did so, to varying extents. Not all five communities progressed as anticipated, but good and fascinating things did occur and are still happening in each. What we can say with conviction is that the original grant support helped establish a foundation for sustainable change. Each has its own experience and legacy – its own *change that abides*.

in retrospect – the long-term effects of specific philanthropic investments. The researchers conducted two or three site visits to each locale, conducted numerous phone conversations, and reviewed pertinent written materials. The present publication condenses and highlights their original report, *A Guide for Grantmakers on the Long-Term Dividends of Philanthropic Initiatives in Support of Families and Neighborhoods* (1998), by Hahn and colleagues (available from Brandeis University, Heller Graduate School, Attention: Joan Walsh, Mail Stop 035, Waltham, MA 02454-9110) Our study, both this version and the longer referenced study above, were completed three years ago. Since there was a significant time lag, the foundation felt it important to bring together participants from the initiatives as well as other experts in the community change field to discuss the findings. The meeting in June 2000 helped shape the Epilogue to this study – See Chapter 5.

This study is part of a family of studies supported and published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (<http://www.kidscount.org>) and others in recent years. Some of the studies that relate to the themes in this report include:

- *The Path of Most Resistance: Reflections on Lessons Learned from New Futures*, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, Maryland, 1995
- *Stories of Renewal: Community Building and the Future of Urban America: A Report from the Rockefeller Foundation* by Joan Walsh, Rockefeller Foundation, New York, New York, January 1997.
- *The Eye of the Storm: Ten Years on the Front Lines of New Futures: An Interview with Otis Johnson and Don Crary*, by Joan Walsh, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, Maryland, 1998

In addition, a series of evaluation reports corresponding to New Futures is listed and reviewed in the Brandeis report (*A Guide for Grantmakers...*) cited above. Readers may also be interested in reports on other foundation initiatives, such as reports from the Pew Civic Change Project about 14 smaller communities, *Planned Serendipity* and *Call it Effective* (available from the Pew website: www.pew-partnership.org).

Relevance of the Study

In the years between the completion of this project and its publication by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, this report has enjoyed life as a kind of "samizdat," not quite an underground document copied illicitly but clearly a document that speaks to the interests of many people as measured by inquiries. In one way or another, community activists, funders and even evaluators aspire to "change that abides." Participating in a sustainable initiative not only benefits local vulnerable constituencies but also those who practice the art and craft of social change.

Simply put, participation in change that abides gives personal and spiritual meaning to the work of community leaders and the many professionals who assist them on complex community initiatives. We think it is this possibility of meaning that has led to the widespread

pre-publication interest in this report. As communities start new initiatives – for example the 22 sites in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s *Making Connections* effort (the centerpiece of the Foundation’s multi-faceted effort to improve the life chances of vulnerable children by helping to strengthen their families and neighborhoods) or any number of others – key leaders anticipate the question: what will I have personally accomplished ... what has taken hold?

Curiously, as interest in sustainability grows throughout the social change industry, little has been written about it. Certainly our conceptions of sustainability have changed but with little by way of formal expression. In the 1970s-1980s, many of us may have believed that sustainability of promising efforts would be assured by rigorous evaluations of the initiatives. This was a "sustainability by social engineering/identification of best practices" paradigm; research findings were supposed to generate interest in replication and sustainability by promoting the knowledge base of the field. Yet we learned that people didn’t always agree on the import of the findings; that the uneven rigor of evaluation designs called into question the findings; that audiences frequently did not exist at all for the utilization of findings; that there were huge time delays between the studies and the institutionalization window; and, that local people rarely adapted that which was studied in the first place, preferring instead to add their stamp, often dramatically different, on the initiative originally evaluated.

Even with this legacy, today we still enjoy social policy and social change by demonstrations and pilots, hopeful but with little else to go on, that the evaluated projects will somehow be institutionalized.

Other models of sustainable social change are well known by readers of this report. Acknowledging the limits of the evaluation approach, many donors and others have adopted a leadership development approach. This model suggests that initiatives will be more likely sustained if leadership is supported to nurture the institutionalization process, to see it through the conception to sustainability chain. Other donors, combining both of the preceding paradigms – evaluation and leadership – look optimistically to community capacity, that is, their emphasis becomes one of saturation programming in particular places, with evaluation of promising practices and leadership development two of many core activities focused on social capital and community problem-solving.

This report introduces and hints at all these themes. As a methodology, the Brandeis team sees this as a prototype, but certainly not the last word, for studies that look at the long-term effects of complex change efforts.

Hindsight is invaluable for tracing the trajectory if any of funder-induced change, especially hindsight over a number of years. It allows the researcher to test the persistence of change efforts; to learn something interesting about "readiness" for change in multiple sites; to record sleeper effects, that is, impacts that lie just below the surface and then emerge under special circumstances; and the methodology allows qualitative researchers to study the equivalent of "regression to the mean" or the phenomenon of observing community impacts experiencing an initial halo but then to have community life return to business as usual.

An Overview of the Findings

Not surprisingly, the interactions between foundations, grantees, and other community members varied considerably among the five sites as they did the complex work of social change. However, the patterns of outcomes and lessons that appeared can be traced back to virtually all dimensions of grantmaking, including who should get grants, the size of grants, the structure, and the length of time they cover. These insights may interest grantmakers, their intermediaries (subcontracted experts), community activists, social change organizations, policymakers, media representatives, and others who seek to promote community building.

Two patterns of outcomes stand out and will be considered throughout this report:

- *Projects made continued progress after grants were completed.* Those that had appeared successful at the close of the initial grants grew and changed; those that had appeared less successful looked much more successful a few years later.
- *Original grant-making intentions took unexpected, often unpredictable turns, and changed to meet local needs.* The Brandeis researchers call their study (unofficially) “a formal look at serendipity.” Many of the recommendations in the original report discuss the need to embrace the unexpected.

The Five Sites

By studying diverse communities and projects, the researchers could look at crosscutting patterns and principles of interest to grantmakers, policymakers, and community leaders. The five projects studied are all in mid-size urban communities but vary by region, state of revitalization, foundation activity level, expectations, outcomes, and structure: three youth collaboratives, a leadership development initiative, and a neighborhood health center.

Funding for three sites – Little Rock, Arkansas, Savannah, Georgia, and Dayton, Ohio – came from the New Futures initiative, a five-year (1987-1993) Casey Foundation program of systems reform and quality-of-life outcomes for low-income youth. New Futures focused on school reform, student retention, academic success, youth employability, youth development, risk reduction, avoidance of teen pregnancy and early parenting, and neighborhood strengthening. New Futures sites also developed a cadre of case managers to assist individual youth and their families. This is an example of large multi-year grants saturating a few places with financial and capacity-building opportunities: each site received approximately \$10 million over five years (matched with local resources).

Savannah and Little Rock shared many characteristics. Conditions were ripe for community renewal in both cities: the Annie E. Casey Foundation added momentum to a process already underway. In both cities, a well-established civic and political elite had traditionally made key decisions. Thus, the task of mobilizing critical institutional support was less daunting than in communities with more diverse decision-makers. For both cities,

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a major national foundation grant represented a windfall, in dollars, prestige, and visibility: the local philanthropic culture and links with national foundations were weak in both cities. Seen as success stories at the end of New Futures funding, both continue efforts that look very much like the initial concept. The projects enriched the stock of social capital in both cities, nurtured skilled and independent leaders, and developed a culture of civic engagement, enhancing the communities' abilities to address important youth issues. A note of interest is that, since 1990, while violent crime in Arkansas is up fifty-five percent, in Little Rock it's down thirty percent. One factor present in this community and not in others is the attention given to youth development.

Dayton, a city known for “good government,” saw New Futures as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. With the infusion of funds, the city focused on school improvement, including a middle school case management strategy, a citywide business-school partnership to promote youth employment, a K-12 sexuality curriculum, “The Collaborative” (a powerful community-wide policy board including prominent local decision-makers), and an active Youth Advisory Board providing input from young people. Dayton illustrates the challenge in determining an intervention's ultimate success. It committed most of its New Futures resources to the public schools, where relatively minor short-term improvements were realized. In 1993, the program was considered weak, even a failure, in many ways. Hindsight, however, suggests a different story. Dayton appears to have laid a foundation for community change after all. Community activists did not disappear. Revitalization looks different from the way it was envisioned a decade ago, but it lives on nevertheless.

In the Fall 1993, New Futures changed its name to the Youth and Family Collaborative and within two years took on the challenge of responding to a state initiative it had a hand in inspiring, namely for each county to form a Family and Children First Council. It has been said that the state's invitation in the early 1990s to counties to form FCFC's was based directly on the then Governor Voinovich's desire to see something like New Futures spread to other counties. FCPC became the official successor to New Futures for Montgomery County in 1995.

During the second half of the 1990s in Dayton – and as a result of these efforts – all public schools hired full-time nurses and expanded school-based health services (although sadly, Dayton Public Schools, due to a budget crisis, have been forced to lay off more than half the school nurses in the 1999 school year, a situation that is once again under review by children and youth advocates.) A truancy prevention/early intervention program is reducing absenteeism in the primary grades. A community-based adolescent health center has been created. Another, though less direct, result is a major one-stop job center that brings together services from more than 40 local employment and human service agencies. Finally, as noted, the Ohio State legislature has mandated the establishment of a FCFC in every county.

Casey Foundation funds also supported the fourth project, the Leadership/Technical Team (LTT) initiative in **Alameda County, California** (focused in the city and surrounding

County of Oakland). In 1992, the Casey Foundation gave \$210,000 to the Oakland-based Urban Strategies Council for the LTT. An independent project – i.e., not part of a broader foundation initiative or multi-site effort – the LTT convened city and county agency leaders, along with non-profit staff and business representatives, to develop a systems-reform agenda for Alameda County through collaborative decision-making. The LTT’s story shows vividly how even a modest investment can help create a framework for meaningful social change. While this project did not come to fruition as originally envisioned, it became absorbed in a larger, state-supported initiative – a Policy Academy – to explore ways to pool funding streams for new approaches to improve services and outcomes for families.

The fifth project is **Boston’s Codman Square Health Center**, a community-based ambulatory care and multi-service center founded in 1975 by neighborhood activists. The health center’s mission is to improve the physical, social, and mental health of the residents of this low-income neighborhood. The health center’s story begins with an \$18,000 W. K. Kellogg Foundation Community-Oriented Primary Care fellowship, intended as an incentive for physicians to increase their community involvement. It became a way to combine community organizing and health outreach through Community Health Workers (CHWs), who went door-to-door, talking with residents about health issues, community concerns, and community services and resources. The Community Health Education Team (CHET), the department housing the CHWs, supplements and complements the health center’s clinical services. CHET’s manager, a community health nurse by background, sees herself as a bridge between CHET and the health center’s clinical services. The original modest grant thus started an enduring tradition listening to and organizing the community; broadened the center’s agenda; led to subsequent grants from diverse funding sources; and enhanced community participation, capacity, social entrepreneurship, and leadership development. The health center is widely viewed as a catalyst and vehicle for neighborhood transformation and family strengthening – in much the same way and toward the same goals as did initiatives entering communities through the education or social-service sectors. This suggests value in looking at multiple potential points of entrance for community intervention.

The remainder of this review is organized around two of the study’s principal recommendations for funders, their intermediaries and local operating entities:

- Cultivate “ripeness” for change and seek opportunities to enhance social capital, and,
- Make a commitment to the long term and operate flexibly and respectfully during the process.

So simple. So straightforward. So obvious. Yet these recommendations are, in many quarters, still seen as “noise” along the way to some set of desired outcomes such as reducing risk behaviors or improving specific conditions in neighborhoods, education bureaucracies or government. This report, however, suggests these principles lay the groundwork for “the onset of possibility” – which may be not only the best we can do, but the best we could want to do.

Cultivate “ripeness” for change and seek opportunities to enhance social capital

Chapter Two

Suppose you went to bed and woke up ten years from now, twenty years from now. What kind of neighborhood do you want to see? How would it be different?

Funding investments are more likely to succeed if the community is willing and able to invest itself in the process – if it is “ripe” for change. What makes one community ready for change and another inflexible or reluctant? A “ripe” community likely includes a widely shared urgency for action, a positive policy climate, the presence of civic capital, strong local capacity, and/or the potential for reinvestment. Paradoxically, however, the characteristics that contribute to ripeness may instead create a stake in the current agenda. Strong communities that think they know where they are going and have a plan to get there may be less likely to want to start over and less open to outsiders’ ideas about change. Before jumping into a “ready” community, a funder or intermediary must check and re-check each party’s understanding of concepts and strategies, to determine the degree to which stakeholders are in sync. It is important to anticipate and recognize different perceptions. To some, for example, promoting collaboration means developing healthier working relationships among colleagues and competitors. To others, it suggests averting rather than confronting conflicts and backing away from change.

The five communities studied were ripe for change:

Savannah’s Chatham County is known as “the kingdom of Chatham,” in reference to its perceived isolation from the social movements that transformed other parts of the south. At the start of New Futures in 1987, Savannah was emerging from extended economic and social stagnation. African-Americans were notably absent from visible leadership roles. Further, as an influx of young homesteaders and entrepreneurs transformed the scene, black residents found themselves priced out of neighborhoods where their families had lived for generations. A series of high-visibility crimes in a low-income neighborhood known as “Area C” added impetus to a growing coalition for change. During this period, City Manager Don Mendonsa assembled maps showing the overlay and concentration of crime, teen pregnancy, school dropout rates, unemployment, poor housing, and poor health. Based on the links revealed between social problems and entrenched poverty, he concluded that Savannah was risking its future growth and prosperity by remaining a “tale of two cities.” In addition, residents in poor neighborhoods needed public support to reinvest in improving their quality of life. To that end, Mendonsa trained community organizers to knock on doors and persuade people to come to meetings and to dream:

Suppose you went to bed and woke up ten years from now, twenty years from now.

What kind of neighborhood do you want to see? How would it be different?

City Hall, the organizers, and the residents then identified actions that would lead to change. But Mendonsa found that these efforts still didn’t reach “the most vulnerable – the poorest of the poor.” This convinced Mendonsa of the need to target resources narrowly toward improving children’s life chances, in part through addressing the dysfunction of public institutions – particularly schools. The Casey Foundation thus found a like-minded, strategically placed ally who was more than willing to invest his own political capital, as well as requisite matching funds from the city, to establish the Youth Futures Authority (YFA) to oversee policy and programs for children and families.

Little Rock, the largest city and capital of the “The Natural State,” boasts a diverse economy, but, especially at the start of New Futures, its inner-city neighborhoods struggled with inadequate housing, crime, and unstable families. Despite traditional intervention efforts, resources had not often made their way into these neighborhoods. Projects to upgrade infrastructure with federal funds had been largely unsuccessful, in part because they ignored input from residents, reducing the likelihood of neighborhood buy-in. Before the New Futures era, community leaders were forthright about Little Rock’s problems and searching actively for solutions to overcome the barriers they faced. When New Futures brought the resources and impetus for a collaborative focus on youth, the city was poised to capitalize on the opportunity.

In the **Dayton** metropolitan area, as in others, prosperity stopped short of many inner-city neighborhoods. Still, with a long-standing reputation for commitment to good government, the city seemed ripe for change in 1987. Dayton had already taken innovative steps to reshape its human service agencies into a more coherent system. New Futures seemed to be a unique opportunity to build on those beginnings and expand the collaborative process to include the schools, the juvenile court system, and other sectors.

Alameda County/Oakland conditions were also ripe for change. Categorical funding streams hindered residents’ access to social services and local leaders’ ability to coordinate and collaborate. City- and county-level systems changes were needed and desired. The LTT, part of an effort to join the Oakland Unified School District with major county agency directors, represented a new and, in the funder’s estimation, logical way to promote the involvement of prominent individuals and their organizations in systems change.

The Codman Square Health Center’s neighborhood was poor, fragmented, and distressed when the W. K. Kellogg Foundation awarded the Community Oriented Primary Care Fellowship in the late 1980s. The fellowship proposal’s stated goal – to decrease infant mortality rates – mirrored a citywide concern about low-income neighborhoods’ high rates. The first step in the fellowship was to conduct a survey to promote residents’ involvement in achieving the goal. Unexpectedly, however, community members placed a higher priority on addressing crime, violence, lack of economic development, and lack of opportunity for youth. The health center proposed changing course to respond to the community’s concerns. The Kellogg Foundation respected the findings – and the health center’s ripeness – and approved the redirection.

In all five communities, the somewhat academic-sounding concept of “social capital” – having social change strategies build on indigenous social networks, leadership, and talent – took on real and meaningful importance.

To foster long-term, substantive community change, a funder must enhance a community’s social capital. Social capital encompasses human as well as financial assets that contribute to a community’s ability to work collaboratively, learn continuously, capitalize on opportunities, and create a climate conducive to change. Essential ingredients from

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a funding perspective are giving the grantee operating freedom; using the foundation’s “vetting” role; recognizing the importance of leaders’ vision and creativity; developing leaders and supporting their career trajectories; leveraging resources; and creating a culture of civic engagement. All of this takes time. It is no wonder that improvements made possible by foundation initiatives often go unnoticed in short-term studies.

Promoting Community Ownership

A first step in enhancing social capital is promoting community ownership of the program. To that end, the funder and community must overcome obstacles to trust. Members of inner-city communities such as those featured in this report are often isolated from nearby political, social, economic, and cultural centers. At the same time, they often – rationally – impose a certain amount of isolation on themselves: residents have many reasons not to trust their neighbors or local “officials” – agency representatives, business people, school system administrators, even middle class community agency managers. Successful funders must build consciously on the community’s character and history to inspire trust – and develop capacity. As one New Futures participant put it,

“You cannot give a change model to a community. You need to say, ‘what is your model of change’ and work with them to strengthen it”

A second observer put it a little differently:

In order to help a community build its capacity to reach its goals, you need to find the pulse of that community, what makes it pump blood. It is different from community to community (and neighborhood to neighborhood), depending on the leaders, history, and life experiences of the key participants. Until you understand that, you can’t influence them.

Communication about respective roles and goals is crucial to establishing trust. Foundations must not set lofty, unachievable goals, must ensure mutual understanding of goals and plans, and must design programs that reflect the same goals as the stated ones.

Leveta Hale, a former **Little Rock** New Futures case manager, reflects on differing expectations. Early on, she remembers, she thought New Futures “was about ‘institutional change.’ That meant that the lives of the families and children receiving services would be measurably improved, and that the systems would look at families and children differently, not just as powerless people who needed to be ‘fixed.’ “So...as case managers [we began] to document all the barriers to services that people faced, and all the barriers to interagency cooperation. And we sent this information to the board of New Futures, and...they actually said, ‘don’t send us this stuff anymore because we can’t do anything with it. It’s too big. It’s too much’.”

Similarly, **Savannah’s** Chisholm noted, “People in the community...don’t want you to determine what the policies and programs are going to be, who their leaders should be. That was part of the New Futures mistake. They planted [the initiative] in different cities and [said] ‘this is what we are going to do.’ [Later in the project, they] began to ask themselves, ‘Who is not here at the table? Whose voices do we need to listen to more?’

And they realized that the people who were not at the table were the people working most closely with the populations the Casey Foundation was trying to impact.”

New Futures leaders in **Dayton** pointed out that, while New Futures was described as comprehensive and community-wide, the key outcome measures were dropout rates, course failures, grades, and other school-related numbers. A participant said, “We didn’t look at child welfare, juvenile court problems, [or other issues]...Educators felt they were under fire and were the only system being measured.” The measures’ message was that the schools were accountable, and everyone else could stand outside the fray and snipe.

Developing Leaders and Empowering Communities

As the Brandeis researchers studied the impact of the Casey Foundation’s initiatives in Little Rock and Savannah, they noted that the Foundation generally modeled behavior that produced a series of positive but often unanticipated effects:

When we look for spin-offs, we should look at how the foundation’s stance and style as manager of a social change initiative established a norm for the New Futures site directors who in turn adopted a similar risk-taking and entrepreneurial approach to their sponsorship of local community initiatives. Leadership sets the tone locally but also in the funding community. In the New Futures sites, the Foundation’s leadership was central.

Funder behavior can affect social capital profoundly, particularly in the areas of developing leaders and empowering communities. But providing a training ground for leaders through foundation initiatives is often not seen as worthy or important. In all five sites, to varying extents, the funders enhanced local leaders’ sense of confidence and competence, encouraged their intellectual independence, and served an “anointing” role, signaling that agencies and individuals were worthy of support. The sites then used this social capital to help others in the community, serving as a kind of second-generation leadership incubator. In New Futures, for example, the Casey Foundation’s top executives promoted risk-taking and creativity among community practitioners. These grantees challenge and dispute. They articulate viewpoints reflecting experience in low-income communities. They are at the table with funders, not as tongue-tied supplicants, but as collaborators whose valuable first-hand knowledge helps to close the gap between policy and practice. Grantee independence and self-assertiveness stands as a testament to a funder’s commitment to enhancing social capital. It also enriches and expands the discourse shaping the foundation’s strategic thinking.

Of the three New Futures sites in this study, the Casey Foundation’s technical assistance (TA) efforts may have scored their highest marks in **Savannah**. According to Gaye Smith, interim YFA managing director, the Casey Foundation’s TA approach communicated respect and caring: “The [Casey Foundation] staffing was wonderful.... Every month we’d have a conversation, set up a list of things that needed to happen, and they started happening ... but without taking over the community’s role. ... We needed that external push because there were some things that it was easier to hear from someone else than for one of us to say.

...[Funders] come into our community, plunk down a bit of money, suck data out of us, and leave us without any capacity or result we can use.

Unfortunately, our experience is not the norm in projects of this kind.” She credits the Casey Foundation with creating a strong sense of community leadership and ownership. Before New Futures, she recalls, cynicism accompanied most relationships with funders:

You tell the funders what they want to hear; you do the budget the way they want, you implement the plan they gave you. They take their data, they go home happy. It doesn't make you a confident partner... As a result of our Casey Foundation experience, we're a lot more empowered about not getting into...funding relationships where an outside entity is going to come into our community, plunk down a bit of money, suck data out of us, and leave us without any capacity or result we can use.

In **Little Rock**, Leveta Hale explains, the anointing role was pivotal: “prestige...helped recruit people and bring them to the table. People were attracted by the Casey Foundation name. It provided a higher profile... That Brandeis University was involved as a TA provider around youth issues was attractive as well.... It was the place you had to be. If you were not at the table, it was embarrassing.” This benefit grew exponentially, as the original group went on to model what they had learned for other colleagues, thereby serving as a second force of change agents

In **Dayton**, many participants and observers considered meetings of the Executive Directors Group exemplary TA sessions. The exchanges for many stakeholders in the community and county provided opportunities to share ideas, gain the buy-in of local leaders invited to attend, and allow people in comparable positions in other agencies to hear each other.

At the **Codman Square Health Center**, grantee independence is associated with leadership building. The health center's success with taking the initiative with funders has helped it in turn to support meaningful neighborhood participation (e.g., representation on the health center's board and staff) and nurture community leaders.

Alameda County had relatively less hands-on Foundation involvement – reflecting, in part, the LTT's single-site status and the Casey Foundation's confidence in the Urban Strategies Council. Still, the foundation's behavior engendered leadership. Every LTT member interviewed said the Casey Foundation-financed TA led to benefits that persist. The LTT's former director, Susan Lubeck, recalls:

The relationship with the Casey Foundation was great. They were colleagues – very accessible and not bureaucratic. We knew they were interested in what we were learning, they were there to consult with, but they didn't impose anything on us.

The experience in all five communities suggests that developing leaders and supporting key community members' career trajectories contribute significantly to social capital. Nevertheless, as the full report describes in more detail, this is often overlooked as an important part of an initiative in and of itself.

The personal relationships were invaluable. I still count the original folks as friends, and we've gone on to work on other things.

Edward Chisholm embodies this legacy in **Savannah**. An African-American in his mid-30s and originally a YFA case manager, Chisholm moved on to head Healthy Start, intended to reduce Chatham County's infant mortality rates. From there he spent a year as a Casey Foundation Fellow (a leadership development program for those who aspire to policy and management positions in youth-related agencies), and is now special assistant to the mayor of Savannah. This notable, perhaps unintended, example, which was certainly not captured in early documentation, represents a genuine contribution to the social fabric of a community.

Leveta Hale also worked her way up from a case manager position. New Futures, she said, "gave me the exposure, the contacts, and the networks....Lots of [us]...really got turned on to the issues of public policy and children and families [and] went on...to become executive directors, program directors.... [Our] perspective is a little broader than simply feeling 'I'm just going to provide my own little service here and that's where it stops.' There really is an attitude that 'I've got to get out of the box and bring other people [into the conversation] and communicate...to get [children and families'] needs met.'...it certainly was a springboard, and the training that I got...was a tremendous investment that paid off. That first group of case managers was probably some of the best-trained workers in the city... The involvement of the Casey Foundation staff was really important [in terms of] how we thought about ourselves and our future, how that enabled us to move on and do other things."

The Casey Foundation, says **Little Rock's** Tom Dalton, can take credit for "grooming" New Futures board members who went on to occupy other positions of influence; he himself is now the Governor's advisor on human services reform!

In **Alameda County**, former LTT member Joan Davies, who continued to work on school-linked services issues with the Interagency Children's Policy Council (ICPC) (the successor to the state-sponsored Policy Academy) after LTT disbanded, explains:

The personal relationships were invaluable. I still count the original folks as friends, and we've gone on to work on other things. It taught me the value of extended dialogue and discussion on these issues. And I grew professionally.... I really miss it – the opportunity to talk about tough issues with smart people from different fields, and to be exposed to cutting-edge thinking from around the country.

Yet several informants noted that leadership development in fragile communities carries a certain risk. As grass roots leaders are identified and supported, they may move up to positions of higher responsibility within the community – or they may leave the community behind. The challenge is to enrich the neighborhood's intellectual and motivational resources so that if one leader moves on, others remain. Analysts and activists are beginning to recognize the issue of "community brain-drain." Still, even before tackling this issue, the field of social change needs to acknowledge that leadership matters and is an appropriate way to measure success.

The communities studied had a hodgepodge of categorical programs, each with its own funding streams, eligibility requirements, and performance standards...this disjointed “non-system” failed to meet the communities’ multiple, overlapping needs.

Collaboration Leads to Civic Engagement

The communities studied, like most others, had a hodgepodge of categorical programs, each with its own funding streams, eligibility requirements, and performance standards. Education, health, and service agencies worked discontinuously, inconsistently, and even at cross-purposes. Policymakers and planners rarely welcomed community perspectives. Researchers, advocates, and funders tended to agree that this disjointed “non-system” failed to meet the communities’ multiple, overlapping needs. Collaboration was therefore seen as a crucial change strategy. An early New Futures priority, for example, was establishing youth collaboratives, in which stakeholders would set to work on coordination problems; establish and monitor indicators such as student achievement, dropout rates, and youth employment; and promote community and institutional accountability. The model assumed that good, locally generated information, in influential advocates’ hands, would lead to meaningful reform, especially in allocating government and school resources.

According to former **Savannah** case manager Michael Porter, however, the YFA board appeared reluctant to challenge the status quo. Creating a structure for collaboration became an end in itself, a substitute rather than an instrument for systems change. According to Edward Chisholm in Savannah, with the benefit of a retrospective look, it took time for the excitement of collaborating to give way to the real substance of what collaboration is supposed to accomplish. He notes, that “when you go out and talk to neighborhood groups, neighborhood association presidents, you find that people have been working for years to make a life better in their particular environments, their necks of the woods. But it took time for the big collaboratives to think about collaborating with the neighborhoods over there...This is changing...now, we do this as a team...”

In **Little Rock**, former city manager Tom Dalton, New Futures Board President for four years, blames pervasive turmoil and divergent interests within the school system for lack of collaboration and institutional change. From 1987 to 1993, there were six different superintendents. Furthermore, a series of court orders, in effect for more than two decades, “always captured center stage in the hearts and minds of the superintendent and the school board,” he says. Asked about New Future’s lasting impacts, however, Dalton cites the central role of collaboration: “there continues to be a table at which many diverse interests sit to discuss youth-related issues.” His colleague Boyd Ward, New Futures deputy director (1989-1994), adds, “Everybody thinks they know how to collaborate but they don’t... New Futures was the place where folks...learned what it takes to make collaboration work. And those skills have been carried on in other ways on other projects. ... It wasn’t as if we were the only people who were dreaming up collaborative projects, but we had the resources, the time, and the staff to facilitate those processes, so we became the hub for a lot of efforts. Little Rock is a small community, and the same people have traditionally been tapped to do planning and policy work. We broadened that network, we brought in folks who had never before been invited to the table.” People who had never met forged relationships that in turn had important offshoots. The city housing authority chief, Lee Jones,

*“New Futures
changed my attitude....
The traditional view
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disrupt the classroom.
Now I see the
value more.”*

a long-time New Futures board member, says the board “brought together everybody from the mayor and the chief of police to neighborhood leaders.... You build relationships that way. Policymakers become more inclusive in their decision-making.”

Dayton’s Families and Children First Council (FCFC), the successor organization to New Futures and the community’s prominent human service policy body, took on the complex task of bringing together public and private agencies and establishing common human service policy goals. It also formed the Executive Directors’ Group (a network of human service agency directors) and the Service Brokers Network (mid-level agency staff designated as interagency problem-solvers), and hired a school-human services liaison. As leaders noted, many can’t “speak the human services language,” so they brought the schools into the Directors’ discussions and built a strong, cooperative relationship between school and agency directors. From early in New Futures, however, initiative leaders and the school administration differed on goals and priorities: New Futures targeted middle and high schools, while the district superintendent’s priority was early childhood and elementary education. Additionally, though both school and community leaders wanted to improve the schools, each often faulted the other for lack of progress. Community leaders saw the schools as slow and resistant. To them, it seemed that school personnel refused to accept the initiative and move ahead with reform. Educators, on the other hand, felt the community was disclaiming responsibility for the schools and for children’s outcomes, and was one-sidedly criticizing hard-working teachers and administrators. The good news is that, as human services for students evolved, so did support for school-related social services. A superintendent said,

“New Futures changed my attitude.... The traditional view of social services is someone coming to disrupt the classroom. Now I see the value more.”

In this instance, the funder might have done well to understand more about school-community relationships during the proposal process. In addition, though the city appeared poised for reform, no one wanted to take Dayton’s “good government” apart just to keep an outside organization happy. One observer noted, “We hire smart bureaucrats and have a healthy respect for the bureaucracy. So if someone comes in and says, ‘we’re going to change things through collaboration,’ it does not happen easily.” And it takes time.

Yet by 1993, progress was achieved. As the New Futures initiative was ending, Brother Raymond Fitz, New Futures and FCFC Chairman, chaired a countywide task force to examine child protection services. One of the task force’s principal recommendations, pushed by Brother Raymond Fitz (S.M., Ph.D.) based on his New Futures experience, was to establish a single collaborative to bring together county agencies and nonprofit organizations.

Alameda County’s LTT adopted an unusual collaborative building approach. The Urban Strategies Council purchased team members’ time, to encourage accountability and responsibility-sharing among individuals and agencies and to compensate for adding responsibilities to full schedules. The Council also attempted to let the Team develop its own mission, goals, and work plan, again to heighten accountability and a sense of shared ownership. In the first six months, the group did some relationship building but made little

progress toward an agenda. The Council then obtained professional facilitation for the LTT, which helped promote better communication and planning, and established a formal steering committee to plan its agenda. But it was too late for the LTT to produce dramatic short-term outcomes. Communication among groups with little history of collaboration was often strained. The LTT had to confront significant differences and lingering reticence and suspicion among the community-based agencies, business people, and public agency leaders with whom they needed strong relationships in order to move forward. The Council's commendable efforts foundered on these political tensions. Moreover, the steering committee members were mid-level, implementation-oriented agency representatives whose caution and inability to commit their agencies to new endeavors were further hindrances. The committee also lacked the reality check for plans and strategies which senior agency directors could have provided.

For the **Codman Square Health Center**, collaboration was more organic. Defining health as "more than health care" and thinking of "the community as patient," the health center has played an important role in transforming the large urban neighborhood of which it is a part. Before the initial W. K. Kellogg grant, the center had worked with churches, nonprofit groups, businesses, and other civic organizations to form the Codman Square Neighborhood Council. The Council acted to strengthen families, improve service delivery, and enhance the quality of life. Leadership, bolstering stabilizing influences, identifying natural collaborative relationships, building community capacity, and improving access to health care have deepened the health center's ties to the community and helped it help others find common ground on which to collaborate. However, when a foundation required collaboration with another health center, it drained time and resources away from higher-priority activities, according to health center staff.

Assessing Increases in Social Capital

A variety of outcomes may demonstrate an increase in social capital. Two examples are influencing public policy and leveraging additional public and private investments.

According to Mary Willoughby of the **Savannah** YFA, "We were one of the only communities in the state that was gathering information across several agencies and using that to look at the whole picture. The state followed our lead, so instead of asking communities to give isolated annual data, they started to ask for baseline and trend information... We also pioneered a common intake strategy... We've had work groups on it for five, six years. So, when a new state Human Resources Commissioner came in, he invited us to be a partner in piloting a new system. We formed a local committee to work on the software... Because we had this experience as a community, we were able to speak with one voice to the state. There were two or three times in the process where as a community, we hit the wall, and said basically, if you design a system that doesn't reach the goal of a value-added experience for the consumer – the person seeking service – and the front-line worker, then we're off the team. And by being a pretty aggressive partner, we've changed their behavior."

Little Rock New Futures enjoys credit for a direct policy intervention that has brought institutional credibility to the concept of prevention. Largely through Tom Dalton's New Futures efforts, Little Rock voters approved a 1994 half-cent sales tax increase. The proceeds helped create and sustain a network of nearly thirty community-based programs that provide a base for employing and training youth workers.

Boyd Ward offers another example of how New Futures strengthened the community's ability to affect public policy. "The Youth Initiative Project (twelve YIP sites still operate in Little Rock) was a gang intervention effort that sort of came up spontaneously because we had a staff person from the community who had a concept, had a dream, and went out and sold that dream. New Futures had the financial resources to make it happen. Eventually, the city government bought into the concept."

The **Codman Square Health Center** not only continues to survey residents about service quality, satisfaction, and community health, but it also pursues information on other community issues as well. In 1998, the Center established the Civic Health Institute as its public policy arm. The Institute works with neighborhood residents and organizations to increase participation in community life and to inform and influence community leaders, public officials, educators, researchers, and health care organizations about how efforts such as theirs build stronger families and neighborhoods. Moreover, the center's initial \$18,000 Kellogg Foundation grant allowed it to garner additional financial support from the Kellogg Foundation as well as the Kresge Foundation, an anonymous donor, and the state Public Health Department. A key part of building on the original grant was a subsequent Kellogg Foundation grant for the Community Health Workers (described earlier). This further enhanced the health center's image, credibility, and opportunities for further funding. The story behind this leveraging is leadership. Center staff learned to push for their agenda and identify flexible, progressive funders.

Codman Square is, in fact, a prime example of social entrepreneurship in developing and implementing community-wide reform strategies. The health center has extended and increased its resources by linking health care and community organizing in mutually advantageous ways. In its role as a community resource, the center serves as an incubator or fiscal agent for community organizations unable to start a new project on their own or incorporate as 501(c)(3) organizations. With this service, the health center builds community capacity, develops additional local leaders, and helps non-profits that, in turn, further strengthen the community. Whether you call this leverage, survival, capacity building, growth, or investment, it implies that a grant's scale is sometimes less important than how it is used and what is done with it.

Make a commitment to the long term and operate flexibly and respectfully during the process

Chapter Three

It takes patience, persistence, flexibility, and a long-term perspective to support an environment ripe for change.

It seems reasonable to expect a foundation grant, especially a large one, to change the course of a few organizations. It may not be reasonable to expect it to transform the whole community. History, local personalities, and inertia, among other factors, stand in the way – especially given the short time horizons favored by many funders. Moreover, the foundation investment is small when compared to the community's other resources and institutions. It takes patience, persistence, flexibility, and a long-term perspective to support an environment ripe for change; to build trust among community sectors and between the community and the funder; to solder relationships; to increase capacity and leadership; and to generate the social capital needed to sustain success.

Not surprisingly, probably every survey of foundation grantees has yielded the grantees' recommendation for multi-year funding to build community trust and get the work done. Foundations' and grantees' time horizons, however, often differ radically. The case studies illuminate the importance of a long-term horizon to catalyze change that abides. With time, there are more significant instances – as we have seen thus far – of “change that abides” than commonly thought.

“Long term” is the operative phrase. Looking only at short-term quantifiable outcomes risks missing important long-term outcomes related to building social capital. The most meaningful results may not be reducible to a simple, short-term assessment. Financial planners advise that committing to the market for the long term yields the best results. The same principle applies to community revitalization. Time frames must allow seeing the forest and the trees. Long-term evaluation or documentation is critical to discern crosscutting themes among project sites. Community-building and systems-reform initiatives – which should include the factors mentioned, such as building trust, developing leaders, cultivating new inter-agency relationships, and pursuing a vision collaboratively – take time to succeed.

The Brandeis retrospective certainly documents many of these “time matters” themes. To help illustrate this, we turn to a source of great anxiety to communities, the timing of evaluation requirements.

Some informants saw the New Futures evaluation process as intrusive and counterproductive: lots of people coming in and out, reports to respond to every few months, and a rigid conception of goals and outcomes. The major issue, however, was the sense that evaluation too soon and too public served as a battering ram rather than a positive tool. In the words of one collaborative member, “every time the evaluation team came to town, it felt like we stepped back six months.” Said another, “We knew we were struggling. But it made it more difficult to have the evaluators looking over our shoulder, especially since the Casey Foundation wanted wide distribution of the reports. It was an added obstacle...

Having that level of intense scrutiny held over your head, knowing it would be published each year, that was hard. I remember having the second-year evaluation on my desk and the media technical assistance people calling to help with damage control. I felt I was in the vortex of a tornado...

“What the commitment to multi-year funding did was to lend a stability and permanence to the effort.”

Along with time, money matters over the long haul. Money generally makes a difference and multi-year funding makes a more substantial difference. Grantor resources – though they are not necessarily the overriding factor – can help the community leverage more resources. A grantor’s multi-year commitment goes even further by instilling community confidence that the commitment is real and the site is not at the mercy of a fad.

Each of the five sites in this report experienced various successes that appeared only over time – such as nurturing second- and third-generation replacements for leaders who move on; the program’s ability to sustain itself, financially and otherwise, after the initial funding stream ends; and simple longevity. According to Savannah’s Edward Chisholm,

One of the indicators of the success of New Futures is simply that it’s been around so long.

People at the community level are used to programs that come and go – what public education activist Carl Marburger called the “hula hoop syndrome”: project staff performs on a rigid time table with little up-front time for community trust building and buy-in, then leaves on the prescribed date without ongoing support. Not surprisingly, those studying the project conclude, “it didn’t work,” long before significant effects could be realized. This, in turn, leads to community cynicism as community leaders and service providers see the project as just one more outside intervention using them as guinea pigs. Says Chisholm, “We [had too many] youth who were used to having adults come into their lives, being there for awhile, and as soon as the kids began to trust them, they were gone. It left a very bitter taste. The longevity of New Futures is one of its hallmarks. And people are now seeing it as part of the community.” Chisholm’s colleague Gaye Smith adds,

“What the commitment to multi-year funding did was to lend a stability and permanence to the effort. Having dealt with an awful lot of foundations [and] federal grants, I’ve come to understand that a time frame of short duration means that some of the most valuable learnings and impacts happen after the close of the books.”

“Without some longer window for impact and evaluation, you really...only make marginal change...you can’t build something that is new and comprehensive. What the size, scale, and duration of the Casey Foundation investment did was to challenge this community to think far outside the box in ways that we would never have dreamed of. The foundation created the place and opportunity [and] helped unleashed forces that have permanently altered the landscape. We’ll never go back to the way it was before.”

The **Dayton** New Futures initiative has produced positive programmatic and systemic changes that were not visible six years ago, when the official program ended. Dayton can now boast a leadership role in several programmatic and service-delivery initiatives with New Futures roots. The Families and Children First Council (FCFC) and the Directors’ and Service Brokers’ groups represent collaborative “systems change” vehicles that grew out of New Futures; the outcomes mentioned in Section I are similarly related. Although critics say that much of the \$20 million associated with the original five-year project

It didn't get broken in five years, and it won't get fixed in five years. You just don't change a mind set and a culture in that short a time.

was spent on programs that were flawed at best, and many participants believe that the original stakeholders were overly optimistic, the foundation money brought people together and inspired them to work toward sustainable change. New Futures represented an opportunity to do something important. Although its impact on the public schools was limited, except in the realm of social-service delivery (nothing to trivialize in today's era of Beacons and other school-service-neighborhood efforts), many observers believe that New Futures did help the city move in important new directions and "change the conversation" in important ways. New Futures laid the groundwork for a new generation of community-wide collaborations and an ongoing community commitment to improving services for children and families. The Dayton initiative with its dual urban and metropolitan or county emphasis remains committed to collaboration as a valuable process for bringing about change, and has continued (if not increased) its investment in core New Futures ideas and mechanisms. The Montgomery County FCFC has taken the New Futures experience in developing local leadership up a significant notch. At the state level, New Futures was instrumental in passing legislation mandating the establishment of FCFCs – in essence expanding the New Futures collaborative idea statewide. All eighty-eight Ohio counties now have FCFCs. As one observer commented, "I don't think the Casey Foundation should assume that the Dayton story was as poor an investment as the original evaluation laid out."

Dayton's experience suggests that if the Foundation could have continued maintenance funding for a few more years, it would have continued learning, and the community would have gained not only ongoing support but also the experience of success. "If the goal was to put some pieces in place," noted one observer, "then five years made sense. If, however, the goal was really to see systems or sustainable change, it was much too short." As another participant commented,

It didn't get broken in five years, and it won't get fixed in five years. You just don't change a mind set and a culture in that short a time.

The Dayton initiative suggests a three-phase approach perhaps of interest to comparable projects on the drawing board. Phase I would be an initial planning period after the grant is awarded: "Now that we have the money, let's figure out what we **really need** to do and get the agreements in place." Phase II would be pilot testing and supporting operations, where a large Foundation grant would still make a difference. Phase III would be a long-term implementation and continuation phase, providing a maintenance level of funding for core staff to provide needed planning and policy support, assuming benchmarks of success and other relevant considerations.

Some elements of the Dayton experience, in fact, suggest that these kinds of community change initiatives will generally demonstrate slow, incremental change. As noted earlier, communities that appear ready for change may be the least likely to want or need to start over. They may be most likely to argue that meaningful reform requires – one of Dayton's

themes – a much longer time-frame than New Futures allowed: “slow and steady wins the race.” While Dayton may have originally appeared poised for reform – in part because of the existence of a human services levy and other “good government” reforms – the fact that much of the system was basically working meant that no one wanted to take it apart to meet an outside organization’s idea of change.

Codman Square Health Center’s Community Health Workers (CHWs) experience also suggests potential value in grantmakers’ committing to an organization beyond providing seed money. This speaks to the “time horizon” issue, as well as to the need to respect shifts in plans that trial-and-error community-building make necessary. Health center staff, volunteers, and other community members were surprised and disappointed when the Kellogg Foundation rejected a third grant proposal to support the CHWs. These workers had achieved many goals and the health center was gradually finding other funds to cover salary costs. Kellogg Foundation staff had supported, even publicized, the model – but said they thought the health center should have found alternate sources of funding after three years. Some might characterize this as typical of funders’ changing agendas or shortsighted unwillingness to make a long-term investment; others might argue that fostering dependence on a single funding source is unwise. Despite this setback, which included a hiatus and some cutbacks, the CHW program continues. The health center pieced together funds from various local foundations, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and its own operating revenues.

Similarly, almost four years after **Alameda County’s** LTT program ended, observers continue to assert that it laid the groundwork for the Interagency Children’s Policy Council (ICPC) and its systems-change agenda. According to Janis Burger of the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency,

LTT played a crucial role getting things moving. The LTT planted the seeds of talking about interagency work and broke down some barriers. The county would never have succeeded... without the LTT. The work, and the thinking, was critical.

Flexibility and Respectful Responsibility Over the Long Run

The community’s professionals, elected or appointed officials, and other leaders will resist the proposal of any social change initiative if its potential benefits are unclear, or if they feel ignored or treated disrespectfully. Since these leaders will be responsible for sustainable gains, they must be full partners. Funders, of course, should acknowledge and heed the community’s experience, ability, and greater knowledge of local conditions; allow a program to build on its own strengths; and maintain a delicate balance between prescription and support. Funders and grantees need to be flexible about goals and objectives, especially when new information reveals community concerns, so that they can respond opportunistically, avoid Marburger’s “hula hoop approach,” and leave room for serendipity – which plays an under-appreciated role in project success.

Codman Square Health Center is a prime example. Although its original Community Oriented Primary Care proposal goal was to reduce infant mortality rates, the health center's community survey and "civic action agenda" meeting revealed different community priorities. The Kellogg Foundation was flexible, respectful, and got out of the way in approving the change in objective to addressing higher-ranked community concerns. By responding to the community's expressed needs, the health center deepened its ties to the neighborhood with which it worked.

Alameda County's LTT also evolved differently than originally envisioned. As noted earlier, several problems arose in the first months, despite efforts to solve them. But before restructuring could proceed, an opportunity arose that changed its course. The state was seeking eight counties to attend a "Policy Academy" to explore ways to improve services and outcomes for families. Participating counties would have an edge in applying to be one of five state-selected jurisdictions allowed to define outcomes and pool funding streams for new service approaches. The Casey Foundation encouraged and approved Alameda County's transforming the LTT into a Policy Academy participant. Its role, though, was notable more for what it didn't do than for what it did: It didn't demand that LTT explain and account for each twist and turn, worry about formal identity, or pretend to understand local conditions and opportunities better than the grantee. In a sense, it got out of the way, provided strategic encouragement, and banked on the social capital it had sought to create. Alameda County is likely to reap dividends for years to come.

Not all outcomes can be pre-planned. A natural tension exists between relatively unstructured capacity building and a controlled, imposed agenda. Funders and potential grantees should address this issue early in the process. Serendipity should be not just allowed but celebrated when it advances the program. If, for example, funders had ignored Codman Square's surprising survey results or the state opportunity for the LTT because "they weren't in the plans," much community achievement might have been lost.

Conclusion: Searching for Patterns in “Change That Abides”

Chapter Four

...funders should consider the time variable more strongly in determining a project's length, depth, and breadth.

This report traces the evolution of three different kinds of foundation grants in five different settings – Savannah, Little Rock, Dayton, Alameda County, and Boston. Interactions among the funder, grantee, and community members and groups varied considerably, as did the results. However, two major patterns stand out: projects made continued progress after grants were completed and original grant-making intentions took unexpected, often unpredictable turns, and changed to meet local needs.

Additionally, a number of recommendations emerge, involving all aspects of the initiatives examined.

Funders, in particular, should *look for a sense of ripeness*, identifying community leaders who are at least beginning to see the onset of possibility and to grapple meaningfully with community-wide problems. *Ripeness means that multiple sectors and forces are poised to work together toward common goals*. Often civic groups, public agencies, and others have no history of working together; at times, inter-agency suspicion and turf war must be overcome through *collaborative change strategies*. A funder must be prepared to support or facilitate a search for common ground through these techniques.

Successful funders promote community development by supporting community-based organizations' active participation and building consciously on the community's character and history. Such an approach builds enduring capacity and leadership. A striking theme in these case studies is that the foundations did not – and probably could not – understand community conditions, needs, and capacity well enough at the outset to construct clear models and approaches. As a New Futures participant said, “you cannot give a change model to a community. It needs to come from them! but working with funders and intermediaries, people together can work to strengthen it.” In fact, the experiences of Savannah's and Little Rock's New Futures programs and the Codman Square Health Center strongly indicate that funder encouragement of community intellectual independence and assertiveness is a major component of effective leadership development.

The full Brandeis study argues that *foundation staff* who win the community's respect can make a big difference in helping grants bear fruit in the long run. From there, *broad community participation* from all levels should be included from the start of the initiative and throughout implementation. *Buy-in* from key institutions is obviously crucial to success. *Residents in particular* want to know they will have a say in the program's progress. And while collaboration is necessary for success, funders can help to make sure that all *stakeholders agree on its meaning*. Funders and community leaders alike should *avoid dictating forced marriages between specific groups*. Only trusting relationships are predictors of success. But *trust building takes as long as it takes*. That is why the report concludes that *funders should consider the time variable more strongly in determining a project's length, depth, and breadth*. Perhaps American philanthropies interested in neighborhood change, family strengthening work, systems-change, leadership development, and the nexus between community-building and policy development, should consider that it may be *more important to go deep and long than short and shallow*.

Ripeness means that multiple sectors and forces are poised to work together toward common goals.

Certainly one additional lesson from the study is that, if nothing else, *attention to leadership and professional development helps funders create an infrastructure that endures after the grant ends and is crucial if the project is to influence public policy.* Although funders may tend undervalue these efforts, the ripple effects of leadership support persist and often expand. In the sites studied, the funders often promoted relationship-building, helped people make contacts that helped them throughout their careers, encouraged people to work with each other in new ways, and pushed people to think “outside the box.” These strategies were valuable in and of themselves.

Technical assistance built on a sustained, collegial, locally directed, and site-specific approach is more likely to succeed according to the retrospective look in the full Brandeis study. A revitalization initiative without a strong TA component will likely be less effective. *But cookie-cutter TA doesn't work.* TA that will enhance confidence and competence is usually more important to communities than accomplishing the outside funder's short-term goals. Only at the point of open, trusting funder-community conversations is effective and locally directed TA possible. *And again, this takes time to work out.*

Even the issue of *lead entities* takes on new meaning with the hindsight made possible by a retrospective study. We learned, for example, that *a community change project can take on an incubator role with cumulative effects, helping to create and support other organizations that become forces in the community.* The original entity may transform or even become overshadowed, but does this matter if the higher good of meaningful social change is achieved?

Action-oriented social change grants can help shape how the public looks at ideas (such as changing from a deficit model to an asset approach or teaching about the necessary ingredients in systems-reform) and help Foundation priorities (such as stronger families) become community priorities. These approaches can, in turn, generate and support related initiatives, and *change communities' decision-making culture* – perhaps promoting greater expectations and appreciation of collaborative decision-making. *The media, as a gatekeeper of the information the neighborhood and community receives, can help in these processes.*

To recap, when all is said and done, the Brandeis study documented that:

- ***Long-term benefits are not always obvious or predictable.*** All sites experienced at least some longer-term benefits that were not obvious (or even predictable) while the grants were active. Similarly, *longer-term grants give grantees greater status and voice in the community, and likely have a better chance to change practice and culture.* Multi-year funding not only helps ensure that the work gets done, but also builds trust. It makes possible a phasing strategy that can support widespread community participation from initial planning through pilot testing through long-term implementation.

- ***Sustainable change in communities begins often with nothing more complex than “changing the community conversation.”*** Grants can stimulate simple things like just bringing community leaders to the table with government and nonprofit organizations. This escalates as it empowers local leaders and helps them speak more confidently, get results, and contribute to creating a more self-sufficient community. In many cases, groups that are echoes of foundation-funded collaboratives build upon the base laid before them, such as Dayton’s FCFC and Alameda County’s Interagency Children’s Policy Council.
- ***Funders and evaluators must be flexible about changes that grantees propose or that respond to unanticipated circumstances.*** Foundations that encourage open feedback from the community open up new possibilities. Bureaucratic or overly directive programs, and strict adherence to a project’s original identity, goals, and objectives – especially when new information clarifies or reveals unexpected community concerns – are likely to block creative new paths to success.

How often do those of us in the social policy and community change arena wonder what were the enduring results from interventions and demonstrations undertaken in partnership with local communities? What is the change that abides when funders and their helpers invest honest effort in particular places, hoping to spark innovation and collaboration? This synthesis of a longer Brandeis report uses “20/20 hindsight” to examine the long-term effects of earlier investments and then to link outcomes to some of the strategies utilized. What we found was startling in its simplicity. To achieve sustainable change in places and, by definition the families in those places, we must try to locate and understand the confluence of factors that signal a community’s ripeness for change, the presence of local leadership, the availability of civic efficacy and social capital, and the commitment to the long-term. A theme running through all of this is the role of serendipity and the need to help social change activists to realize, or even embrace the fact that wonderful accidents, twists and turns are as much part of the story of community work as formalized experiments. Both can contribute to tangible results for families living in areas of need across the United States.

Time marches on, but reports like *Change that Abides* by their nature capture only a moment, and that moment is often long past by the time a report comes out.

Thus many report writers feel like perpetual authors of post-mortems about people and places from an earlier period. In addition to whatever documentary value that sort of approach holds, the real value of a report like this is twofold: first, at its best it will begin new and perhaps stimulate a different conversation among those whom the report describes; people deeply involved in the lengthy and often tortuous journey of social change. Second, it may organize ideas or raise them up in ways that those deeply immersed in the process haven't considered, and direct attention to whatever or who ever comes next. In that spirit, the Annie E. Casey Foundation sponsored a meeting to avoid the "post-mortem" syndrome and to begin a process of adding value and up-to-date meaning to the report.

On June 1-2, 2000, invited guests, including some respondents from sites described in the report and other experts in community change came together in Baltimore to discuss the report, *Change that Abides*. Independent consultant Rebecca Stone followed the conversation carefully and shared her notes and observations with the Brandeis team. Using these notes and other sources, we have identified the following three themes that build on ideas first described in the report and add to them in important ways:

Theme 1: The Foundation Role Must Respond to Core but Ever Changing Community Needs

Many of the lessons in *Change that Abides* reference foundations and their grantmaking strategies. In particular, meeting participants noted with interest the report's recommendations that philanthropic support of community change calls for core institutional support along with resources for capacity development, risk-taking, and getting the timing right. There was also considerable agreement that the setting of realistic expectations and timelines is absolutely central in work of the kind described in *Change that Abides* and that funding strategies should somehow balance the twin goals of flexibility -- to meet unexpected but promising opportunities -- and accountability or at least a clear vision of what impacts and changes would constitute success.

Here are some comments on foundations and capacity-building strategies in our respondents' own words:

"We need always to remember that doing social change comes at a price. There is a cost to being available to the subtleties and serendipity of change. That cost needs to be treated more explicitly and factored into foundation grantmaking..."

"The effect of Savannah's long-term support from the Casey Foundation was to create an unusual degree of connection with the foundation and unique "degrees of freedom" within the initiative. The endurance and reliability of support is critical to developing this kind of freedom to do what needs to be done."

"Community change is organic. We ought to figure out how to nurture it, not how to direct it, especially from funders."

"The report wakes us up to the work beyond our own blinders. Practice has its own narrowness - issues like training new leadership and getting infrastructure support instead of core project money isn't generally focused on in our everyday work."

"What if grantmaking focused on capacity directly (as opposed to investing in programs that have capacity as a by-product)? If you do it deliberately, what would you get?"

Theme 2: Change equals Leadership plus Serendipity

Members of the review meeting identified strongly with the major theme of the report, namely that success in achieving sustainable change can be captured in the following equation: $C=L+S$ or Change = Leadership plus (Seeing and Seizing) Serendipity.

Participants at the meeting noted that this formula for change tends not to square with the explicit, formal and planned strategies promulgated in part by foundations. This, in turn, poses some interesting and even confusing questions for how funders might go about financing the spurs to change, and how practitioners attempting to plan can be ready to seize unpredictable opportunities. *Change that Abides'* many case studies were seen as especially worthwhile learning tools under these circumstances.

The reviewers' own words about leadership and serendipity:

"Community change means seizing opportunity. How can you hope to assess the impact of an individual or an organization? The equation for change is the right people + the right energy + the right time."

"Philanthropy needs to look at kismet, and how to fund it. What the risks are of funding it, and then take those risks. Particularly as it applies to funding infrastructure, i.e., people who do the work that leads to serendipity and the ability to take advantage of it."

"Ripeness and serendipity and timing are interesting ideas. How do practitioners learn to gauge readiness for certain kinds of initiative? Sometimes, for example, the same program that fails to garner any kind of interest at one time gets embraced as the perfect thing two years later. What are the clues for practitioners about when something will take?"

"What are the factors that throw the social capital "switch?" It's not the money; it's a confluence of factors, and particularly leadership. The best program idea in the world won't fly without a champion. Champions are people who embrace an idea as a life mission, not as a 40 hr. a week job."

"We need to think differently about the diffusion effects of leadership development. Even if leaders leave an initiative, they take that experience and growth and perspective into their next job. We need to think of project leadership as a broad set of values and skills to disperse throughout this and other fields...that really gets us closer to the sustainable development goal..."

Theme 3: Never Enough Attention to Power, Race and Equity

Discussions of community building often suffer from avoiding questions of social equity and justice. Meeting attendees were similarly concerned that issues of power, class, race and equity did not have strong enough voice in *Change that Abides* or for that matter, the community building and family strengthening fields.

Comments on Power, Race and Equity:

"Some change and the work we've put into it has just made entrenched power more sophisticated about how not to share that power. Knowing that, what should we have done? What could we have done?"

"What's missing from the analysis and work in the field is the failure of system reform approaches to attack the front lines of the problems: racism, sexism, class discrimination."

"How do you build and balance staff and resident leadership that supports each other? The report had a moving story about staff development, but what about the resident development?"

Looking Forward: Points of Agreement

There were a number of consensus comments on a variety of themes that bear mentioning in conclusion here, if only to spark the next round of conversations that we hope will occur:

"The benefits of a retrospective analysis approach for community change efforts... The importance of capacity and serendipity and the challenge of funding them flows naturally out of the retrospective methodology..."

"We need to connect the various [summary] themes. For example, we should connect "following the "noise" and the importance of "serendipity" to capacity building and the importance of resident leadership. In many projects it is the neighbors who do the out-of-the-box thinking!"

"Connect the dots. We can't forget that champions need an infrastructure underneath them. That has to be supported as well."

"What's missing is the question of cost, and the relationship of that to what community initiative can accomplish. We have to be able to talk about what it costs to achieve what's been discussed here, and whether that's worth it."

"Think about the usefulness of figuring out some really big mistakes made by really good organizations. If that's catalogued for foundations and others, it might make risk-taking more palatable, to know you're in good company"

"Want to reiterate that there should be a double bottom line: outcomes plus capacity to achieve. Like golf, the more we practice the community intervention, the luckier and more skillful we get at achieving something."

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