



# Reflections

## On Sustainability — Assessing the Long-Term Impact of Three TCWF Initiatives

The first 10 years at The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF) featured foundation-designed grantmaking initiatives. TCWF wanted to take a look back after years had passed to see if any of the grantees' work that began as a result of initiative funding was still in place. The Foundation commissioned Group Health Community Foundation (GHCF) to conduct an evaluation of three major initiatives funded for \$20 million each between 1996 and 2002: the Health Improvement Initiative, the Children and Youth Community Health Initiative and the Work and Health Initiative. GHCF's evaluation, titled "Tracks in the Sand," was large and complex. The main findings and conclusions of the evaluation are presented in this issue of *Reflections*.

# Reflections

On the cover: TCWF's Health Improvement Initiative funded health coalitions throughout the state to improve population health. Grantees brought together people from myriad professions and backgrounds to shape and pursue solutions to health problems. Pictured here, a woman receives breast cancer prevention education as she gets her hair done - as part of the work of the Solano Health Improvement Initiative.

*Reflections* is a series produced by The California Wellness Foundation to share lessons learned and information gleaned from its grantmaking practices and strategies. This document and others in the series are available on the Internet at [www.tcdf.org](http://www.tcdf.org).

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# *preface*



*In its first decade of grantmaking, The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF) developed several funding initiatives aimed at improving the health of Californians. Each of these grantmaking programs was evaluated during the time it was funded by TCWF. However, important questions remained. What happened to the initiative programs and services years after funding ended? Had the grantees maintained the level of effort seen during the initiatives? Had grantees increased or decreased their commitment to the issues they worked on during the initiatives? What was left behind after the initiatives ended?*

*To find answers to these questions, TCWF commissioned Group Health Community Foundation to conduct a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation of the long-term sustainability of programs funded through the three major initiatives, each funded for \$20 million between 1996 and 2002: the Health Improvement Initiative (HII), the Children and Youth Community Health Initiative (CYCHI), and the Work and Health Initiative (WHI). This issue of Reflections summarizes the findings of this evaluation.*

*Data were collected from 51 primary initiative grantees through site visits completed in 2004-2005. Additional data were collected through telephone interviews and review of relevant documents. The evaluation identified and analyzed elements of the initiatives that were sustained. In addition, the evaluators also examined the broader effects, or “legacy,” of the initiatives — other individual, organizational and community outcomes having their origins in the initiatives.*

*The evaluators found that nearly half of the funded work of primary grantees included in the evaluation was sustained at levels comparable to those achieved during the initiatives. In some cases, this work not only survived post-funding, but even expanded. The legacy of each initiative was also high.*

*We hope that this document will be useful to those who want to examine the long-term sustainability of proactive, foundation-driven grantmaking programs on funded organizations and their communities. We welcome your feedback.*

*This document is the 15th in our Reflections series, which is intended to share lessons learned and information gleaned from our grantmaking activities. The entire series can be found on our website at [www.tcdf.org](http://www.tcdf.org) in the Publications section.*

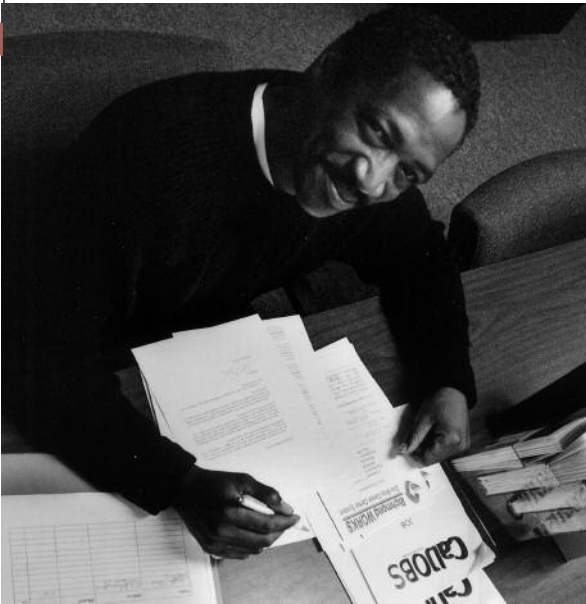
*Sincerely,*

*Fatima Angeles*

*Director of Evaluation and Organizational Learning*

## Reflections on Sustainability— Assessing the Long-Term Impact of Three TCWF Initiatives

California's long and beautiful coastline offers ample opportunities for observing the fate of footprints, tracks, and even elaborate sand castles. Sometimes, the dry and shifting sand doesn't take much of an imprint in the first



GHCF's evaluation included TCWF's Work and Health Initiative, which explored the connections between employment and health through four distinct programs: Computers In Our Future, the Future of Work and Health, Winning New Jobs and the Health Insurance Policy Program.

place, and any trace of our brief presence is gone immediately. Other times, whether it's within a few minutes or a few days, wind and water do their work, leaving just a faint outline of our footsteps, and then there is no evidence they were there at all.

But occasionally, some magic—perhaps qualities

of the sand itself, a protected cove or shift in the tide, and a sturdy castle bolstered with rocks and driftwood—sustains something longer than we'd expect. It seems an apt analogy for evaluating the legacy of large, complex initiatives. What tracks were left in the sand of communities across California, how do we find and measure them, and what can they

tell us about building programs in the future?

Questions about what is left behind years after funding ends are often asked, but rarely answered. In part, this is because funders and grantees alike move on—the project has ended, the final closeout reports are submitted and filed away, some lessons are learned, and it is natural for both attention and dollars to be directed elsewhere to newer, fresher pursuits. An equally powerful force may be the averted gaze—the fear that if we look too closely, we may in fact see no tracks at all and thus no legacy of the tremendous work, funding, and promise that so many initiatives, large and small, have absorbed over the years. Is it better, perhaps, to hope that something was sustained, instead of knowing for certain that little or nothing was?

The “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation, designed and conducted by the Evaluation Team at the Group Health Community Foundation (GHCF) and funded by The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF), is an exception to both kinds of avoidance. It asks and answers the question of what was left behind—in this case, what was left three to four years after the end of three major TCWF initiatives funded (for a total of \$60 million) between 1996 and 2002: the Health Improvement Initiative (HII), the Children and Youth Community Health



Initiative (CYCHI), and the Work and Health Initiative (WHI). The WHI included four distinct components that were assessed separately: Computers In Our Future (CIOF), Winning New Jobs (WNI), Future of Work and Health (FWH), and the Health Insurance Policy Program (HIPP).

The good news is not just that the question was asked and answered, but that the answer is such a positive one. To a large and perhaps surprising degree, nearly half of the funded work of primary grantees included in the “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation was sustained at levels comparable to those achieved during the initiatives. In some cases, this work not only eked out a post-funding survival, but even thrived and expanded. The “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation explores what was sustained, in what form, and what influenced continuation. This report highlights the evaluation’s main findings and implications.

### **DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY**

Researchers, funders and grantees generally agree that sustainability is a worthy goal (although they may do so for different reasons). In order to address the specific interest of TCWE, the “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation defined sustainability as the continuation of specific grantee accomplishments at the level achieved during initiative funding. The Evaluation Team

explored the transition between initiative-funded work and what remained in place several years later.

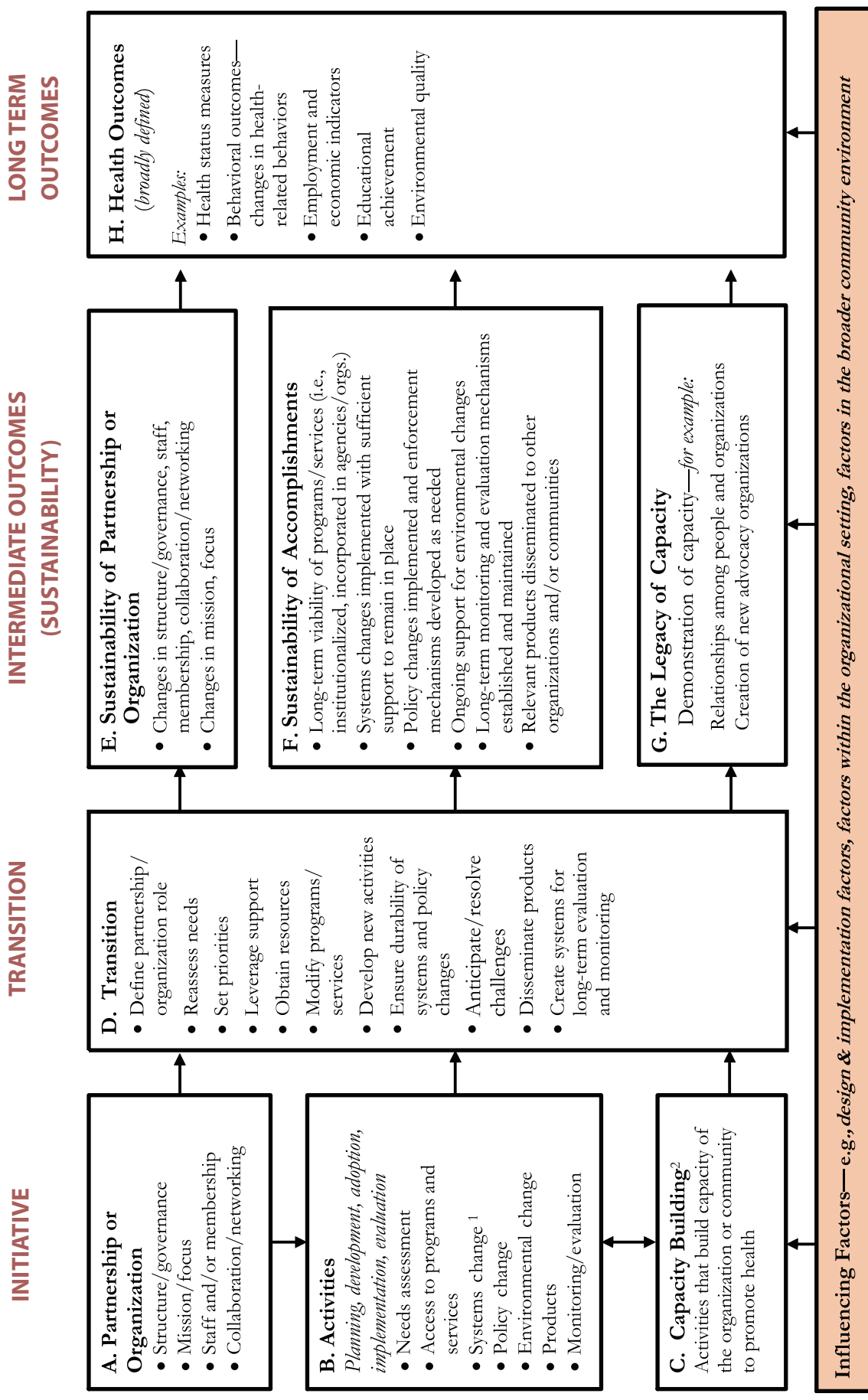
The aspects that were examined included:

- Whether formal partnerships and coalitions continued.
- What happened to specific programs and services?
- Whether decisionmakers continued to support policy changes put in place during the initiative.
- The extent to which changes in systems (such as formal networks of organizations or agencies) remained intact.
- Evidence that changes in a community’s physical and social environments persisted.

What is sustained is an important part of the equation, but may not be the only tracks left by an initiative. The Evaluation Team also examined the broader legacy—other individual, organizational, and/or community outcomes having their origins in the initiative. These include changes in community capacities, such as skills that individuals and organizations acquire. The legacy of initiatives also can be reflected in an improved quality of life in grantee communities.

The legacy of initiatives also can be reflected in an improved quality of life in grantee communities.

# Conceptual Model for Evaluating the Sustainability and Legacy of Community Health Initiatives



<sup>1</sup> E.g., integrated services, data sharing/integrated data systems, results based budgeting.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., health literacy, resident leadership training, organizational development.



## EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS

The “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation design and methods are modeled on an evaluation of the HII (also conducted by the GHCF Evaluation Team). They include a conceptual framework that shows the relationships among different elements, including characteristics of the initiatives themselves such as the partnership or organization funded and the activities they conducted, their transition to the post-funding phase, the intermediate outcomes they were able to sustain, and their impact on broader long-term health outcomes.

The “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation was large and complex, encompassing three initiatives, multiple years, and information about 69 grantee organizations—51 primary grantees funded to provide programs or research, six CYCHI planning phase only grantees, and 12 support grantees. Data were collected through site visits completed in 2004-2005, with additional data collected through telephone interviews with key informants and review of relevant documents. Data were compiled in a detailed case study for each primary grantee.



A Wellness Village, funded by TCWF’s CYCHI and led by NICOS Chinese Health Coalition in San Francisco, identified gambling as a public health issue.

Two levels of analysis were performed:

- The extent to which HII, CYCHI, CIOF, and WNJ grantees sustained specific accomplishments completed during the initiative.
- The legacy related to all primary grantees—how organizations benefited in terms of new skills and capacity and the long-term “imprint” of the initiative in the community.

For the first level of analysis (sustainability) the team constructed a scoring algorithm that placed accomplishment in one of four graduated categories of sustainability: no activity, reduced level of activity, sustained, or expanded level of activity.

## Evaluation Overview

### 3 TCWF Initiatives:

- Health Improvement Initiative (HII)
- Children and Youth Community Health Initiative (CYCHI)
- Work and Health Initiative (WHI — CIOF, WNJ, FWH, HIPP)

### 51 primary grantees:

- 15 from HII
- 9 from CYCHI
- 27 from WHI

### Data collection methods:

- Site visits to grantee three to four years after funding ended
- Telephone interviews
- Document reviews
- Case studies

### 2 levels of analysis:

- Sustainability of accomplishments (HII, CYCHI, CIOF, WNJ)
- Legacy (all primary grantees)



The Computers In Our Future component of TCWF's WHI funded technology centers as a health promotion strategy. Here, a youth of the Karuk Tribe of California uses a computer at the Happy Camp computer center in the Klamath River Valley area of Siskiyou County.

For the second level of analysis (legacy) a similar algorithm was constructed that included: legacy not evident, low, medium, or high degree of legacy. While the analysis of sustainability focused on specific grantee outputs and deliverables, the analysis of legacy was more qualitative and included consideration of a wide variety of information documented in the case study template.

The criteria to assess the legacy of each grantee included:

- The extent to which the grantee organization had:
  - Remained a viable organization.
  - Continued to focus on work consistent with the goals of the initiative.
  - Continued to apply the skills and capacities gained from participation in the initiative for the benefit of the community.
- The extent to which the initiative left a positive, long-term “imprint” in the community.

## ABOUT THE TCWF INITIATIVES

The three initiatives examined through the “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation are described below. The evaluation focused on 51 primary grantees: 15 HII, nine CYCHI, and 27 WHI.

### Health Improvement Initiative (HII)

HII focused attention on “population health,” a concept reflecting the broader determinants of health that encompass environmental factors and the physical, social, and mental health of defined populations. A major HII goal was to





develop strong, long-lasting community capacity to mobilize efforts and improve conditions that limit health and well-being.

The centerpiece of HII, the Health Partnership Program, funded 10 initial planning grants in 1996-97. Nine community coalitions (Cohort One-Health Partnerships) then received four years of funding to plan and implement health improvements in four ways—by building a coalition, changing systems, providing direct preventive health services, and measuring population health. Four additional Health Partnerships (Cohort Two) were funded in 1997 to pursue population health improvements over a three-year period. Grants also were given to two Central Valley Partnerships (Cohort Three) to receive 18 months of intensive technical assistance and capacity building support. All 15 grantees from the three cohorts were part of the “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation.

### **Children and Youth Community Health Initiative (CYCHI)**

CYCHI’s mission was to actively engage children and youth in the transformation of their environments to enhance health and well-being. At the community level, the initiative was expected to promote new integrated systems of neighborhood-based

organizing, action and service, with young people and adults interacting as equal decisionmaking partners. In addition, an initiative goal was to influence public policy in a direction that would affirm children and youth as an important community resource.

In October 1997, 16 communities were awarded 18-month competitive planning grants to develop Wellness Villages that involved youth in every phase of a variety of community projects to promote health. Wellness Villages also partnered with academic institutions and established mentoring programs. In April 1999, 10 of the 16 communities were selected to receive 3½-year implementation grants; nine of these communities were included in the “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation.

### **Work and Health Initiative (WHI)**

WHI’s mission was to understand the connections between work and health—how work affected the health of Californians and how health might be improved through conditions of work, access to employment, and the caliber of health insurance available to California’s workforce. In 1999, 40 WHI grants were awarded to support four distinct programs—two demonstration programs and two research programs. Twenty-seven primary

Evaluation results showed that overall, almost half of the accomplishments of HII, CYCHI, CIOF and WNIJ grantees were sustained at similar or higher levels three to four years after the initiatives ended.

grantees from these four components were included in the “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation.

- **Computers In Our Future (CIOF)** addressed disadvantaged residents’ limited access to computers by funding 11 organizations to create 14 computer centers in low-income California communities.
- **Winning New Jobs (WNJ)** had an initial goal of providing job search training to 10,000 unemployed and underemployed Californians between 1997 and 2000.
- **Future of Work and Health (FWH)** was designed to enhance understanding of the rapidly changing nature of work and its impact on the health of Californians.
- **Health Insurance Policy Program (HIPP)** was designed to increase access to affordable, high-quality health insurance for the uninsured by producing and disseminating reliable health coverage data and providing technical support to local efforts.

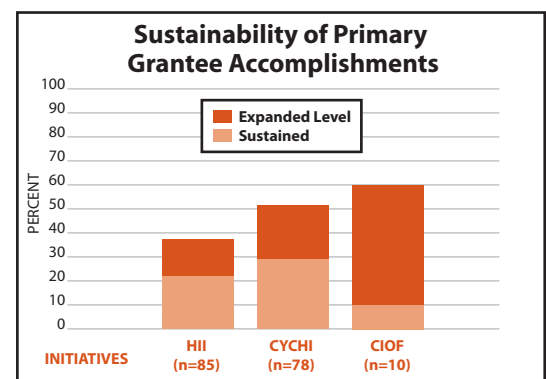
## INITIATIVE FINDINGS

Findings are divided into four sections: one covering overall sustainability and legacy results for all grantee organizations as a group, and three separate sections covering the results for each of the three initiatives.

## Overall Sustainability and Legacy Results

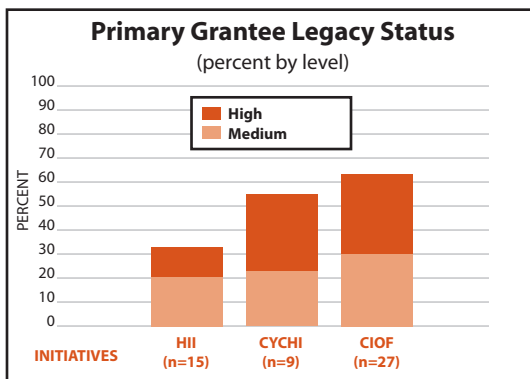
The first step in assessing sustainability was to document the accomplishments each grantee had achieved at the end of TCWF funding. This was done by reviewing available reports and materials authored by TCWF program staff as well as documents generated by grantees. Overall, 176 accomplishments were identified for the sustainability analysis including: 85 from HII, 78 from CYCHI, and 13 from CIOF and WNJ grantees.

Evaluation results showed that overall, almost half of the accomplishments of HII, CYCHI, CIOF, and WNJ grantees were sustained at similar or higher levels three to four years after the initiatives ended. The highest level of sustainability occurred in CIOF with six of the 10 CIOF computer centers continuing to provide services to residents of disadvantaged or isolated communities at levels comparable to or greater than the service levels achieved during the initiative.





Results of the assessment of legacy also were positive. The imprint of the initiative was evident in more than half of the 51 primary grantees. The majority of grantee organizations remained viable, continued work consistent with the original initiative goals and mission, and continued to apply the skills and capacities they had gained. Almost two-thirds of WHI grantees were rated medium or high, while more than half of the CYCHI grantees were ranked similarly. HII grantees had a lower overall proportion of favorable legacy ratings.



### HII Results

The most sustained gains were in the area of systems change, with more than half of systems changes continuing at the same or a greater level than during the HII funding period. Direct-service programs and population health measurement showed the most significant drop in activity, with more

than half of these activities discontinued. Although only four of the 15 Health Partnerships that resulted from coalition building efforts were maintained at the same level as during HII, another six Partnerships sustained some elements of their activities at a reduced level.

Not captured in these sustainability ratings are legacies of HII reported by grantees—the collaborative atmosphere that evolved and was reinforced, the lens of population health and social determinants of health that offered a new sense of priorities and benchmarks, the newfound confidence and voice that agencies now feel when they take their place at a partnership’s table, and the wider circle of leaders and engaged community residents that HII drew to this work.

A significant, tangible legacy of HII is the Center for Health Improvement (CHI). CHI, which had its start under the HII and also was a WHI grantee, has developed a national reputation for its work in prevention-oriented policy and has served as a model for other policy-related organizations in Sacramento.

### CYCHI Results

The “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation assessed the status of 76 specific CYCHI grantee accomplishments under the three main components of the initiative—community

People saw concrete changes to the environment and believed they could make a difference.

health projects, academic support, and mentoring programs. Most of the accomplishments fell into the community health projects category, which also showed the most sustained (29 percent) and expanded (31 percent) activity. Forty percent of academic support and mentoring accomplishments were sustained or expanded.

Although overall more than half of activities and programs were sustained and more than half of grantee organizations received a legacy



Since the sunset of TCWF's CYCHI, the community of Goshen has seen the construction of a pedestrian crossing that allows children to cross over the freeway to get to school. This need was identified during the life of the initiative by the community's Wellness Village, led by Community Services and Employment Training.

rating of medium or high, none retained the identity of a Wellness Village. For example, in Santa Ana, Wellness Village 92701 retained an emphasis on youth and continues its work with youth *promotores* to address youth violence, safety, open space, and beautification, but does so under a different name, The Children's Initiative. The same is true of the Del Paso Wellness Village, which continues many CYCHI activities as part of its current Youth Investment Center.

As part of its legacy, CYCHI funding provided organizations with time and resources to engage youth in activities, and now community youth development is an integral part of many new programs. One informant reported, "Seeing young people grow and wanting to be more [as a result of CYCHI]...the biggest impact is the relationships that were built and the things they learned—that's priceless." Youth received training in many areas, organizational capacities improved, and community empowerment was significant. People saw concrete changes to the environment and believed they could make a difference.

## WHI Results

WHI was an ambitious effort that included four components. While each component was assessed separately in the "Tracks in the Sand" evaluation, only program-focused grantees



(CIOF, WNJ) were included in the first level of analysis, sustainability of accomplishments. The evaluation of each CIOF and WNJ grantee placed emphasis on assessing the sustainability of a single major output or accomplishment—the provision of services.

Five of the 10 CIOF computer centers included in the “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation now provide services at levels greater than the levels provided during the initiative, and one additional center sustained services at the same level. In contrast, only one of the three WNJ job centers sustained services comparable to those during WHI. This grantee, Proteus Inc., incorporated two major components of the WNJ curriculum into its current five-week jobs training program, and now has solid funding and a guaranteed client base.

In terms of legacy, CIOF not only connected young people to computers and higher education, but entire communities (like the isolated Karuk Tribe in Happy Camp) were linked to the opportunities of the outside world. Capacities that were built as a result of CIOF included the development of new community leaders; the ability to work with political, economic, and community processes; leveraging funds; and creating new curricula. The CIOF grantees also formed a network that viewed a policy agenda as a mechanism for sustaining CIOF’s work; this group evolved

into the California Community Technology Policy Group (CCCTPG) and has become a strong presence in Sacramento, advocating for policies that support community-based technology programs and strengthening the voice of low income communities in the policymaking process. Likewise, the WNJ legacy appears in the fact that during the program’s four funded years, more than 5,000 people attended hundreds of workshops, putting many of them on a path to employment and economic stability. It was not only job seekers who benefited; in one site (Proteus, Inc.) the facilitators who led the workshops came to view their jobs as a calling and not a temporary stepping stone to something better.

The two other components of WHI left a legacy as well. Two-thirds of FWH grantees and both HIPPP grantees received legacy ratings of medium or high. Key informants reported the initiative elevated the field of work and health in California. Five of the research grantees funded through FWH continue to publish in the area of work and health and/or have received new funding based on their FWH work. The Institute for Health Policy Studies continues to receive requests for data from the longitudinal survey conducted during FWH. The survey remains the most systematic way to connect health with employment. A HIPPP grantee, UCLA’s Center

Policy and system change activities appeared to be more likely to continue than more intensive efforts, such as direct services.

for Health Policy Research, now conducts one of the largest annual state health surveys in the United States (California Health Interview Survey). In 2005, another HIPP grantee, the Center for Governmental Studies, completed its ninth annual statewide conference on medical coverage and has continued to hold regional workshops on health advocacy issues.

## **FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SUSTAINABILITY**

What made some grantees able to sustain or even enhance their initiative-related activities after TCWF funding ended? Is there the positive equivalent of a perfect storm, where organizational, design, implementation, and external factors converge to increase the likelihood of sustained work? If so, which of these factors are amenable to some type of influence and control, either by grantees and/or their funders? The “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation sought answers to each of these questions.

### **Organizational Factors**

It’s no surprise that effective leadership emerges as a key organizational factor. Among grantees that were able to sustain their work for several years, leadership took a distinct form—a long-term commitment to the community, an orientation to empowering others (whether peers or clients), and an ability to clearly, convincingly articulate a concrete vision and a plan for achieving it. Stability is

another organizational factor that comes into play. Because the learning curve for new initiatives can be steep, organizations with high staff or leadership turnover may lose ground and never regain their footing.

TCWF’s efforts to select grantee organizations whose mission was consistent with the objectives of the initiative paid off. When the mission and objectives were closely aligned, organizations were able to incorporate the initiative’s demands into their portfolios more naturally, without stretching either in terms of philosophy or skill sets of staff. Close alignment with other organizational priorities also made it easier to leverage additional funds to continue the initiative-specific work.

Fundraising and fund leveraging skills deserve their own category as an influential factor—not just the successful procurement of financial resources, but, perhaps even more important, the ability to obtain support and craft creative solutions for institutionalizing new funding streams.

### **Initiative Design Factors**

What about the design of initiatives themselves? Having clear expectations and communicating them effectively is a potentially overlooked factor. While grantees acknowledged the need to begin planning for sustainability early, they also acknowledged a certain amount of denial about the finite nature of initiative funding. TCWF staff, on the



other hand, felt that expectations about sustainability were communicated consistently and clearly. The gap between these two perceptions is perhaps a function of human nature and wishful thinking, but nevertheless warrants attention. Related to this gap is the potential role of technical assistance in helping grantees address sustainability in a strategic and planned way.

The program's focus was related to sustainability. Policy and system change activities appeared to be more likely to continue than more intensive efforts, such as direct services. Although the initial effort may be comparable, policies and systems changes, once in place, may require fewer additional resources to be maintained.

No funding stream can last forever, yet the duration of initial funding is important. The goals of these three initiatives were significant and ambitious. To accomplish planning, implementation, evaluation, fine-tuning, more evaluation, and sustainability planning, such initiatives are likely to require at least five years of funding. It is worth noting that even grantees that believed the initiative timelines were unrealistically short were not seeking an increase in overall funding amounts. Rather, the issue centered on having some guaranteed level of funding (e.g., to maintain staff) for a longer period of time to aid in the transition phase.

### **Implementation Factors**

While multiple funding years help in terms of stability, they also require sustained effort and enthusiasm. Champions of the work (who may or may not be the same as the organization's leaders) need to be in place as strong, convincing advocates to keep the program's momentum going over a potentially long haul, shore up groups and coalitions when energy lags or inevitable setbacks occur, and recruit new allies to the cause.

Sustainability also depends on ties to key community gatekeepers—elected officials, CBO leaders, or community representatives that influence local opinions and resources. In the search for leveraging funds, identifying new partners, and creating stronger alliances, these natural networks are critical. However, it's not just a community's elite, no matter how it is defined, that support sustainability. Broad-based community support from a constituency that may not even have recognized itself as such (e.g., youth tapped as leaders for Wellness Villages or CIOF projects) can transform not only the participants themselves but also the depth of community support and encouragement for an organization and its work.

Effective planning for sustainability is a key factor that involves timing (i.e., beginning to plan for sustainability as soon as programs are stabilized), networking (including a wide range of partners, current and potential, in the

Grantee selection should include a criterion that the organization's mission be closely aligned with the initiative's objectives.

planning process), and being flexible and creative (to help accommodate gaps in funding and meet new funding requirements). Sustainability also requires marketing some type of track record of success or at least of having learned valuable lessons from previous experience. Evaluation is a necessary tool that contributes to grantees' abilities to track progress, improve programs, and communicate results to stakeholders.

### **External Factors**

The communities in which TCWF initiatives took place were buffeted by a variety of external forces, including local and state political changes, economic downturns, and dramatic changes in the technological landscape that were particularly pronounced during the period covered by the initiatives and the "Tracks in the Sand" evaluation. Another factor was the size of grantee communities. Some of the most pronounced and sustained changes seemed to take place in relatively small, contained geographic areas (such as Goshen, a CYCHI grantee, or Happy Camp, a CIOF grantee). In these communities, both devastation and accomplishment were more visible so small gains were particularly noticed and reinforced. Because of the relatively small populations, fewer key stakeholders need to be brought on board, fewer organizations compete for resources, and local political and interagency relationships may be more accessible.

### **PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY: LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

What do these organizational, design, implementation, and external factors tell us about promoting sustainability in the future? The following 13 lessons and implications reflect a combination of "Tracks in the Sand" evaluation results, the comments and suggestions of grantees, and the overall observations and impressions of the Evaluation Team.

**Realistic expectations for sustainability are more likely to be established when community practitioners are involved in the design phase of an initiative.** During an initiative's design phase, reviewers from organizations similar to those of potential grantees can provide insight into how an initiative might "play out" in a community, what is realistic to accomplish, how likely it is to be sustained, and how the initiative can best support sustainability.

**Grantee selection should include a criterion that the organization's mission be closely aligned with the initiative's objectives.**

Certainly some organizations can stretch and achieve great things in a new arena, but in general, the comfort zone that close alignment provides is an added layer of protection for both grantee and funder. With the mission and objectives aligned, grantees can work more efficiently, draw upon existing allies and networks, leverage funds, and rely on existing skills and talents.





**Foundation expectations regarding sustainability should be clear from the outset.**

It is essential to reach a common understanding among initiative stakeholders regarding both the meaning of sustainability and expectations. Once an understanding is reached, it should be clearly and consistently reinforced by frequent communication.

**Allowing grantees to determine specific strategies within the framework of the initiative objectives increases the grantee's investment in the programs they establish.**

The grantee mantra is that one size does not fit all, and while objectives can and should be shared, specific strategies for reaching them should be more flexible to allow communities to set a course that best serves their own needs. Flexibility extends to determining what will be sustained, which requires a balance among the funder's expectations, what the community values most, and what is feasible.

**Sustainability planning should start early.**

As noted above, denial about the need and urgency of planning for sustainability is widespread. In part, this is a communications issue, but it also offers opportunities for targeted technical assistance and support from the funder. Grantees stated that funders could envision a larger role for themselves that includes assistance in identifying funding streams, helping grantees build the infrastructure and qualifications required to access those funding streams, and actively working with state and federal government

agencies and other foundations to leverage resources to build upon the work funded under initiatives.

**Technical assistance should be tailored to the local needs of individual grantees.** Technical assistance provided through the three TCWF initiatives was appreciated by grantees, but had some drawbacks. As noted above, more help with sustainability as a specific topic area could yield dividends for grantees and funders alike. In addition, some grantees found the centralized approach burdensome and even unhelpful, preferring instead to have the latitude to identify and tap their own technical assistance resources closer to home.

**A flexible, formative, and collaborative evaluation design accommodates the unique conditions and characteristics of each community and can contribute to sustainability.** In order to be responsive to the needs of individual grantees (in addition to the needs of funders) evaluations need to include flexible, easy-to-use tools and accelerate the feedback loop so that grantees receive results in a timely way. Evaluation can contribute to program improvement, thus helping programs be better positioned to receive additional funding.

**Resource intensive accomplishments such as direct services are the most difficult to sustain.** The resources required to provide services (e.g., staff and volunteers) made them likely to be discontinued after initiative

Working directly with grantees on issues of retention and succession planning can enhance the likelihood of sustainability.

funding ended, especially in initiatives in which they represent only one component of the grantee's overall work. Foundations should take this under consideration when funding direct services and foster specific strategies to institutionalize services and/or link grantees with other funders who may have an interest in supporting similar efforts.

**Working directly with grantees on issues of retention and succession planning can enhance the likelihood of sustainability.**

Turnover in leadership and staff can be expected during a five-year initiative—particularly as an initiative is drawing to a close, the very time when sustainability efforts are at their peak. Consideration of factors that may affect retention as well as assistance when leadership turnover does occur can enhance the continuity and stability of programs, and thus increase the likelihood they will be sustained.

**Programs are more likely to be sustained when policies are in place that support community health improvement; and foundations have a role in the promotion of those policies.**

Public policy that supports community health improvement is an important factor in the continuation of initiative-funded activities. Foundations are uniquely positioned to play a role in the promotion of policy by convening

stakeholders, supporting surveys and research, funding dissemination of findings, and sponsoring organizations to educate policymakers.

**The duration of program funding should reflect expectations for sustainability.** Even though five years of funding is long by TCWF and other philanthropic standards and was welcomed by grantees as an unusually generous funding period, many grantees expressed frustration at just getting started when funding ended. Grantees reported that the initiatives were almost universally considered too short to maximize the sustainable impact. This was not a plea for more money, but rather for a foundation commitment over a longer period of time.

**“Phasing down” funding during an initiative may encourage grantees to focus on sustainability.**

Tapering funding has a triple benefit of reinforcing the hard-to-hear message that funding is actually drawing to a close, encouraging grantees to focus on sustainability early, and providing a stable and realistic window in which to seek and leverage other funds. Phasing down funding (either as a direct reduction or shifting the formula of matching funds and resources) would encourage grantees to phase in new funding while still having foundation funds to support staff and activities.



**Maintaining grantee networks (“learning communities”) beyond the life of the initiative can promote sustainability.**

Learning communities are universally appreciated as opportunities for networking, sharing problems and solutions, and generally improving day-to-day work and results. Despite the value placed on these interactions, they were difficult for individual grantees to justify once funding terminated. Without outside support, they quickly dissolved. Sustaining learning communities through occasional gatherings or other communication can be a good investment and providing these resources should be strongly considered as an aspect of sustainability.

**SUMMARY**

The California Wellness Foundation has invested significant resources and energy into improving the health of California’s residents and communities through its initiatives. The “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation of three of these initiatives (three to four years after funding ended) showed that nearly half of the accomplishments generated by HII, CYCHI, CIOF, and WNJ grantees had been sustained or expanded at that juncture. These included an array of programs, services, systems and policy changes, and community improvements. At the same time, nearly a third of accomplishments documented at the end of initiative funding did

not continue. The study suggested that sustainability was associated with factors including strong leadership, flexibility and clarity in setting foundation expectations, and early planning.

The legacy of the initiatives includes outcomes that are difficult to measure, including broader ways of thinking about community health, emerging leaders, strengthened relationships, common goals, mobilization of communities and engagement of residents, and trust—outcomes best measured by the future successes of grantees and future improvements in communities. Other important legacies include the work of the Center for Health Improvement and the CIOF Policy Workgroup, now called the California Community Technology Policy Group.

Finally, the “Tracks in the Sand” evaluation provides a model for other foundations considering the evaluation of their own efforts to promote sustainable community change. The lessons learned from this evaluation can help inform foundations as they strive to invest in initiatives that will have a lasting impact in the communities they fund—by leaving tracks in the sand for others to follow.

The study suggested that sustainability was associated with factors including strong leadership, flexibility and clarity in setting foundation expectations, and early planning.

The Group Health Community Foundation’s evaluation team is a Seattle-based resource for assessing the progress, success, and sustainability of health-related efforts. The team is committed to a participatory approach to evaluation — one that includes all stakeholders in the planning, execution, analysis and reporting of results. For 20 years, the team has led large regional and national evaluations of health improvement initiatives that focus on underserved communities. The team’s clients have included foundations, state and federal government agencies, national voluntary organizations, universities, and community-based nonprofits. The team members who participated in the preparation of this document are:

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As vice president of programs since 1997, Beery oversees Group Health’s extensive program, grantmaking, and evaluation/research activities. Previously, he directed Disease Prevention and Community Services, and The Center for Health Promotion at Group Health Cooperative. He has also worked in health programming and evaluation in Africa and Asia. Beery is a professor (affiliate) at University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine. He has held academic appointments at Duke University Medical Center and the University of North Carolina School of Public Health. His evaluation and research interests are community-based health promotion and prevention programs for low-income/high-risk populations. He holds an MPH from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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Senter is a senior project manager holding master’s degrees in Pediatric Nursing (from University of Florida) and Public Health Education (from UC Berkeley). Her nursing practice has included service in the U.S. Navy Nurse Corp, school health nursing, clinical specialist for pediatric neuromuscular outpatient services, and nursing quality assurance. She served as the project manager for TCWF’s HII evaluation, the “HII Legacy Evaluation,” and “Tracks in the Sand.” Prior to joining Group Health’s evaluation team in 1997, Senter was an independent consultant to health care organizations and health-related businesses with an emphasis on program planning, evaluation, management development, productivity and service improvement, health education, and training.

### **Dave Pearson, PhD**

Pearson is the director of evaluation at Group Health Community Foundation and has worked in program evaluation for the past 20 years. He is a professor (affiliate) at University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine. He currently directs field operations for all of Group Health's major health improvement efforts. He has published in the areas of health promotion evaluation, Indian health issues, substance abuse prevention and immunizations. Pearson is a medical sociologist holding a PhD in Sociology from Washington State University.

### **Pamela Schwartz, MPH**

Schwartz is Group Health Foundation's evaluation manager for Kaiser Permanente's Community Health Initiative. She holds an MPH from San Jose State University and has 15 years experience in public health. She recently completed the evaluation of the Partnership for the Public's Health Initiative. While at Boston University School of Public Health, she directed a five-year evaluation of a substance abuse and pregnancy prevention project for adolescent girls. At Arizona State University she directed a multi-million-dollar longitudinal-research project studying adult children of alcoholics. Schwartz has worked in Guatemala with indigenous populations and in Israel with Ethiopian populations.

### **Lisa Hager, MHA**

Hager is a project manager who earned her MHA in Health Services Administration with an emphasis in public health from University of Washington. She spent three years with the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health where she directed several HIV/AIDS education evaluation projects. Hager spent the next 10 years in predoctoral and graduate medical education program design and evaluation at the University of Washington and at Group Health.

The following resources are available in the Publications section of [www.tcwf.org](http://www.tcwf.org) for those interested in learning more about TCWF's Health Improvement Initiative, Work and Health Initiative and Children and Youth Community Health Initiative grantmaking programs.

### Evaluations

Brousseau, Ruth and Peña, Lucia Corral, *Evaluations and Lessons Learned From Our Grantmaking — The Work and Health Initiative*, The California Wellness Foundation, 2002.

Donaldson, Stewart I. and Gooler, Laura E., *Summary of the Evaluation of The California Wellness Foundation's Work and Health Initiative*, Claremont Graduate University, 2002.

Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound, *Health Improvement Initiative Final Report*, Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound, 2003.

Jemmott, Frances and Angeles, Fatima, *Evaluations and Lessons Learned From Our Grantmaking — The Children and Youth Community Health Initiative*, The California Wellness Foundation, 2002.

Procello, Alicia and Nelson, Gary, *Evaluations and Lessons Learned From Our Grantmaking — The Health Improvement Initiative*, The California Wellness Foundation, 2002.

### Annual Reports

2000 TCWF Annual Report, "Health Improvement Initiative."

2001 TCWF Annual Report, "Work and Health Initiative."

2002 TCWF Annual Report, "Children and Youth Community Health Initiative."

**The following previous issues of *Reflections* can be accessed at [www.tcwf.org](http://www.tcwf.org) in the Publications section:**

"Reflections On Our First Initiatives"

"Reflections On the Impact of Devolution on California"

"Reflections On the Connections Between Work and Health"

"Reflections On Strategic Grantmaking"

"Reflections On Capacity Building"

"Reflections On Sustainability"

"Reflections On Public Policy Grantmaking"

"Reflections On Communications Strategies That Accent Grantees"

"Reflections On The Safety Net: A Case for Core Support"

"Reflections On Evaluating Our Grants"

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"Reflections On Leadership — The California Peace Prize"

"Reflections On Increasing Diversity in the Health Professions"

"Reflections On TCWF's Responsive Grantmaking Program"

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