



LOCAL VOICES

On-the-Ground Perspectives on Driving Community Change in the Making Connections Sites

BY SCOTT HEBERT

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Formal evaluations help communities understand how and why specific interventions improve their outcomes. Yet understanding the impacts of long-term social and community investments requires more than formal evaluations. Developing useful knowledge to improve practice and policy also requires the candid reflections of partners and implementers on the ground, who are the real change agents in these complicated projects. Casey has a long history of commissioning practitioner reflections about the successes and challenges of its major initiatives as an integral part of its learning agenda.

A year ago, Casey published *Community Change: Lessons From Making Connections*, which summarized the Foundation’s decade-long community change initiative, Making Connections. It highlighted six important lessons for the future of community change from the Foundation’s perspective. In developing that report, we realized it was equally important to capture the reflections of a diverse set of site leaders on how Making Connections made a difference in their communities. *Local Voices* records these reflections and, to a great extent, reinforces the lessons captured in the earlier report. Both identify successes and mistakes and make suggestions for how investments in community change strategies can be most effective.

Learning from long-term initiatives is a challenge that requires multiple perspectives. We hope *Local Voices* contributes to the field’s understanding of what it takes to assist communities in building better futures for their kids and families.

Robert P. Giloth

Vice President
Center for Community and Economic Opportunity
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Debra Joy Pérez

Vice President
Research, Evaluation and Learning
The Annie E. Casey Foundation



FOREWORD



Making Connections was designed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation as a decade-long initiative to spark transformation in families, communities and institutions to produce better life outcomes for children in some of the most challenged neighborhoods in the United States. In Making Connections, Casey emphasized building or enhancing three kinds of connections essential to strengthening families: pathways to economic opportunity, connections to social networks and access to services and supports. In addition, relatively early in the initiative, Casey articulated its belief about the importance of the Making Connections communities developing a set of “core capacities.” Casey recognized that its investments, even over a decade, were unlikely to be sufficient to create long-term change for disadvantaged neighborhoods and families, especially on a large scale. Accordingly, Casey encouraged and supported the Making Connections sites in building core capacities that would help those communities to sustain their community change activities. Among the core capacities that Casey emphasized were a focus on results, the ability to use data strategically and resident voice and leadership development. Casey also emphasized the importance of identifying local champions who would support the maintenance of these capacities over time as part of business as usual in pursuing community change.



This paper examines, from the perspective of local stakeholders in former Making Connections sites, the enhancements that have occurred over the past decade in the capacities of their communities to articulate and pursue their change agenda. It also explores whether and how those capacity enhancements have led to improved outcomes for children, families and neighborhoods. The data for this study comes from structured telephone interviews conducted in summer 2013 with a sample of 19 local stakeholders in seven of the 10 former Making Connections communities. These individuals were selected based on their deep engagement in and knowledge of the local initiative activities; many led portions of the work. In the interviews, we (the Community Science research team) stressed that our study was not about the specific Making Connections goals, strategies and results per se; rather, it was focused on learning about any improvements to their community’s broader capacity to pursue its change agenda on an ongoing basis that had resulted either from Making-Connections-related activities or other concurrent efforts.

When asked about the evolution of their change capacities, all 19 respondents indicated that their communities’ overall capacity to articulate and implement a community-level change agenda and to achieve results had significantly improved during the 10-year period of Making Connections. In comparing their current capacities to those prior to the initiative, respondents used language such as “dramatically better” and “increased very significantly and substantially.” In addition to commenting on the communities’ overall change capacity, they also offered assessments of the enhancements that had occurred to specific core capacities over the decade:

- ♦ Fifteen of the 19 respondents indicated that their community was experiencing increased levels of collaboration among providers and across stakeholders.
- ♦ Twelve respondents also reported improvements in their community’s use of data to inform the local change efforts.
- ♦ Eleven respondents indicated their community has an institutional home (or homes) for ongoing change efforts.



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- ♦ Twelve respondents noted that the willingness and ability to engage residents had improved in their community.
- ♦ Twelve respondents also reported improved capacity to move from demonstration efforts to larger scale.
- ♦ Eleven respondents indicated that their community's ability to articulate a change agenda and promote a common vision for change had improved.
- ♦ Ten respondents indicated that they have seen improvements in their community's capacity to leverage other resources for the change efforts.

Although respondents were encouraged during the interviews to name any other concurrent initiatives or factors that helped to promote the reported increases in capacity, overwhelmingly, the most common key factors cited were related to the training and support Casey provided throughout Making Connections. Specifically, the respondents emphasized the information on best practices and tools and the leadership training provided by Casey, and the ongoing reinforcement for certain practices and principles during the 10-year initiative — such as the emphasis on collaboration, the focus on results and managing by data, the importance of resident engagement, etc. — that resulted in these modes of doing business becoming second nature to local stakeholders.

However, the improvements in community capacity were never intended, either by Casey or the local stakeholders, to represent an end in themselves. Rather, such improvements were seen as mechanisms that, either directly or indirectly, would result in better outcomes for children, families and neighborhoods. Accordingly, during the

telephone interviews, we asked the 19 respondents if they were also seeing better outcomes. All but a few of the interviewees were able to provide concrete examples of what they reported as improved outcomes for children, families and neighborhoods that they felt had been fostered by the improved capacities. The respondents' examples of improved outcomes covered a wide gamut of substantive areas, including early educational advancement, reduced student absenteeism and improved academic performance, increased employment connections, income and asset gains, decreases in criminal recidivism rates, and improved neighborhood facilities and quality-of-life features such as increased access to affordable housing, recreational facilities and cultural amenities, as well as an expanded range of goods and services available through local businesses.

Nonetheless, it also must be acknowledged that none of the interviewees could provide evidence of their communities having yet moved the needle relative to population-level outcomes in the target neighborhoods. The respondents described a variety of factors that they felt had limited the communities' ability to achieve such outcomes. One reason offered was that the interventions are still evolving and growing and have not yet reached a saturation level or even a tipping point in the targeted geographic areas. In addition, in some of the communities, respondents indicated that the process of moving to scale is impeded because the improved capacities and practices remain largely limited to a few high-performing organizations rather than being adopted more broadly across the community.

This paper examines, from the perspective of local stakeholders in former Making Connections sites, the enhancements that have occurred over the past decade in the capacities of their communities to articulate and pursue their local change agenda.

Another factor that respondents mentioned as negatively impacting efforts to achieve population-level outcomes — in some communities, the most important factor identified — was the economic downturn. Worsening economic conditions have both increased the need for services and supports and reduced the resources available to address those needs. This makes it exceedingly difficult to maintain existing infrastructure, much less expand efforts.

Some respondents also noted the mobility of the population and changing demographics as key factors challenging their community change capacities and their ability to achieve desired population- or community-level outcomes. In some instances, the families who have made advances (including resident leaders) have moved out of the community. Moreover, the families moving in to replace them may not only have multiple needs but also may require providers to develop additional capacities to meet those needs (if, for instance, there is a large influx of non-English speakers). In other cases, the affected neighborhoods have begun to gentrify as a result of the revitalization efforts that have occurred, and, although the neighborhood itself may be improving, it becomes increasingly difficult to ensure that the community's long-term residents can benefit from the improvements and are not displaced.

The reflections of the local stakeholders in the seven former Making Connections sites have yielded an array of lessons about how future community change efforts might be more effective in building capacity and achieving

outcomes at greater scale. Although it is difficult to single out a few key lessons regarding scale, sustainability and impact from our analysis of the local stakeholders' experiences and perspectives, some of the more crucial lessons for funders and practitioners include recognizing the importance of:

- ♦ creating mechanisms for ongoing resident participation in planning and executing change efforts;
- ♦ engaging residents and developing skilled resident leadership as drivers of accountability;
- ♦ building the essential change capacities across networks of organizations and stakeholders within a community, rather than allowing them to remain siloed in a few organizations;
- ♦ establishing structures that promote collective accountability and emergent learning;
- ♦ addressing the difficulties that communities experience in having the hard conversations that are instrumental in identifying and addressing dysfunctional systems and practices (and fostering collective accountability);

- ♦ enhancing local stakeholders' capacity to take efforts to scale, not only through replication but also through policy and system change;
- ♦ identifying mechanisms to sustain capacity enhancements up front as part of the capacity-development process instead of waiting until dedicated funding is winding down; and
- ♦ securing the buy-in of local funders as the most logical sources of continuing incentives and reinforcement for providers to maintain improved practices and to further enhance their capacities.

This last point is particularly important. For the community change capacities to be maintained and continue to grow, they need to become part of the norm that funders insist upon and support. Without that ongoing funder emphasis and support, it will be difficult for even the most well-intentioned practitioners and community groups to devote the effort necessary to sustain these capacities in an era of increasingly scarce resources.



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INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE, CONTEXT AND APPROACH TO THE STUDY

The purpose of this paper is to examine, from the perspective of local stakeholders in former Making Connections sites, the enhancements that have occurred over the past decade in the capacities of these communities to articulate and pursue their local change agenda. It also explores whether and how those capacity enhancements have led to improved outcomes for children, families and neighborhoods in those communities.

Background and Key Community Change Capacities

Making Connections was designed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation as a decade-long initiative to spark transformation in families, communities and institutions to produce better life outcomes for children in some of the most challenged neighborhoods in the United States. Launched in 1999, the Making Connections initiative was based on a simple premise: Children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods. Although the Making Connections theory of change became far more complex and detailed over the life of the initiative, the strategies implemented in the initiative sites consistently reflected this underlying premise about the importance of place in promoting better outcomes for children and families.

The 10 Making Connections communities,¹ and the strategies implemented in

those communities, were seen as a way to test Casey's belief that it is possible to foster concrete improvements in the outcomes of children and families in even the toughest neighborhoods. In Making Connections, as a response to research on the characteristics of disconnected neighborhoods,² Casey emphasized building or enhancing three kinds of connections essential to strengthening families: pathways to economic opportunity, connections to social networks and access to services and supports.

In addition, relatively early in the initiative, Casey articulated its belief about the importance of the Making Connections communities developing a set of core capacities. Casey recognized that its investments, even over a decade, were unlikely to be sufficient to create and sustain long-term change for disadvantaged neighborhoods and

families, especially on a larger scale.³ Accordingly, the Foundation described a set of capacities that it felt would help the Making Connections sites to develop and support mobilized communities that could drive and sustain change over the long term. The core community capacities articulated in 2001-2002 were:

1. A broadly shared vision for achieving improvements in outcomes for children and families.
2. A constituency of residents that is informed about and engaged in strategies to achieve results, and that is assuming increasing responsibility and power in those efforts.
3. Partnerships (within and across sectors) focused on achieving the desired results for kids and families.
4. The willingness and capacity of public systems and service providers



to modify policy and practice in response to family needs and resident-defined priorities.

5. The development, use and maintenance of strong data and information systems to meet the information needs of neighborhoods, residents, stakeholders and decision makers to guide the family-strengthening work, to monitor its progress and to promote accountability for results.
6. The necessary infrastructure to develop, manage and sustain the core capacities and the transformation process that will allow the community to pursue improved outcomes at scale.

Casey had developed this list of core capacities based on the collective experience of its staff and consultants with place-based efforts prior to Making Connections. While this core capacity guidance was viewed as a work in progress at the time, it proved to be remarkably well-aligned with the findings of subsequent research and the published literature on key success factors in community change initiatives.⁴

Our Approach

Although we (the Community Science research team) reviewed relevant written materials for the Making Connections sites (both documents produced during the initiative and more recent materials), our study's principal sources of data were telephone interviews conducted with key stakeholders in the former Making Connections communities. We first conducted some brief reconnaissance discussions in December 2012 with a handful of representatives of former sites to expand our un-

derstanding of the promising topics to explore in our study and to inform the development of a structured telephone interview protocol to collect systematic information on those topics.⁵

Using the interview protocol developed, in summer 2013, we scheduled and conducted a round of structured telephone interviews with 19 local stakeholders⁶ in communities representing seven of the former Making Connections sites (see Exhibit 1 on the next page); these sites represented the subset of the 10 Making Connections communities that had implemented the most comprehensive sets of strategies throughout the initiative.⁷ The interview candidates from these communities were selected in consultation with Casey staff to reflect an array of perspectives. All of the selected local stakeholders had been actively engaged in their site's Making Connections activities, and many led portions of the work.

The phone interviews with these individuals generally lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours each and covered a broad set of issues. In the interviews, each stakeholder was asked for an assessment of whether the community's overall ability to articulate and pursue its change agenda had been enhanced over the period of the Making Connections initiative and, if so, in what ways. We also stressed to the respondents that our study was not about the specific Making Connections goals, strategies and results per se; rather, it was focused on learning about any improvements to the community's broader capacity to pursue its local change agenda on an ongoing basis that had resulted either from Making-Connections-related activities or concurrent efforts.

We also asked the respondents to comment on the specific core capacities (e.g., articulation of a common vision, resident engagement, effective use of data, etc.). We asked whether these capacities had changed over time, what factors had contributed to those changes and whether and how these capacities had influenced each community's overall ability to pursue its change agenda. We also asked about the results that had been achieved through these change efforts in terms of outcomes for children, families and neighborhoods.

This paper presents the findings from our exploratory study. To the extent possible, we present the perspectives of the local stakeholders from the seven former Making Connections sites⁸ in their own words. We start by presenting data relative to the stakeholders' characterizations of their communities' capacities to pursue their change agendas prior to Making Connections. We then contrast that with the stakeholders' assessments of their communities' current capacities to articulate and pursue their change agendas. Following that, we examine the outcomes for children, families and neighborhoods that the stakeholders feel have resulted from their communities' changes in capacity. We then examine the continuing challenges the communities are facing in sustaining and enhancing their core capacities and ability to pursue their change agendas. We conclude with a discussion on key lessons and a list of do-overs — that is, recommendations from the stakeholders for what the communities or their funders should or would do differently as part of a new community capacity-building or change initiative.⁹

EXHIBIT 1: INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED FOR THE STUDY

Structured Telephone Interviews (June–August 2013)

Denver:	Mike Kromrey, executive director, Together Colorado Cecilia Broder, Mile High United Way
Des Moines:	Rob Denson, president, Des Moines Area Community College Julie Fugenschuh, executive director, Project Iowa (former Making Connections site coordinator for Des Moines)
Indianapolis:	Bill Taft, executive director, Local Initiatives Support Corporation – Indianapolis Lena Hackett, consultant (former site coordinator) Jerry Keys, resident activist/community organizer Elizabeth Ryan, resident activist/community organizer
Louisville:	Dana Jackson Thompson, executive director, Network Center for Community Change (former site coordinator) Jerry Abramson, lieutenant governor of Kentucky (former Louisville mayor) Carolyn Gatz, economic and workforce development consultant
Providence:	Patrick McGuigan, director, Providence Plan Garry Bliss, director of government and external relations, Providence Center
San Antonio:	Nancy Hard, president and chief executive officer, Family Services Association Dennis Campa, associate director at the Annie E. Casey Foundation (former director of the Community Initiatives Department for the city of San Antonio) Henrietta Muñoz, director of grant research and evaluation, United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County (former site coordinator) Martha Castilla, resident leader/community organizer
Seattle/White Center:	Sili Savusa, executive director, White Center Community Development Association (former resident activist/community organizer) Bob Watt, board vice-chair of Thrive by Five Washington and board member for Casey Family Programs (former senior executive at Boeing Commercial Airplanes)

PREEXISTING CONDITIONS: COMMUNITIES' CAPACITIES TO PURSUE THEIR CHANGE AGENDAS BEFORE MAKING CONNECTIONS

The communities selected as Making Connections sites had experienced a number of change efforts in the years preceding the Casey initiative. For example, a variety of organizations and stakeholders in San Antonio had been involved in a health policy campaign to promote children's health insurance, and others were engaged in creating a network of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites throughout the city to provide free tax preparation to low-income individuals. Public and philanthropic partners in Louisville had worked together to establish Neighborhood Place, a one-stop center for social services. Indianapolis was just completing its Neighborhood Preservation Initiative, funded by Pew Charitable Trusts. These are just a few examples of the change efforts pursued in these communities prior to Making Connections.

Stakeholders' Assessment of Change Capacity Prior to Making Connections

Despite these previous efforts, when the local respondents were asked during the phone interviews to describe their community's change capacity when Making Connections was just getting underway, a majority of the interviewees (11 of the 19) indicated that their community had limited ability to organize, articulate or implement a change agenda at a neighborhood or service-delivery-system level at that time. Respondents from all seven of the former sites offered that assessment.

As Martha Castilla, a resident leader from San Antonio, characterized the situation in her community at the commencement of Making Connections: "It [i.e., the change capacity] was not very strong. There was a strong desire [on the part of local stakeholders] but not an understanding of the process or knowing how to articulate a solution." Likewise, Bob Watt, a vice president at Boeing Commercial Airplanes during the period of Making Connections, described Seattle/White Center's capacity thusly: "I would say there was limited capacity to pull the community together around any sort of agenda.... A number of nonprofits were working in the [White Center] neighborhood, but not in alignment or collaboratively."

Watt's comments reflect a common theme voiced by respondents regarding the existing change capacity in the communities when Making Connections was launched: At the time, most local groups and efforts were operating in silos,¹⁰ and they were not collaborative or comprehensive. Ten of the 19 respondents, representing six of the sites in our study, offered that observation.¹¹ Jerry Keys, a resident activist in Indianapolis, stated: "It was mostly individual organizations doing their own thing. There weren't a lot of people working together [in Indianapolis] in that time period. There were organizations doing good work on their own, but not collaboratively." Nancy Hard, chief executive officer of the Family Services Association in San Antonio,

According to a number of respondents, the dearth of coordinated efforts at the neighborhood level was symptomatic of a larger issue — the general lack of attention to place-based initiatives by funders, elected officials and provider organizations in those communities.

particularly noted the lack of coordination at the neighborhood level:

There was a lot of talk about collaboration and people wanting to come together to make change, but at the neighborhood level, we weren't at the point where there was a collaborative or concerted focus on systems or neighborhood change — outside of small, individual efforts. There were community groups, churches, etc., trying to change one thing or another. Small neighborhood associations were the main activity at the neighborhood level. There were discussions about service delivery systems, but I can't recall any successful efforts. There was lots of talk but no focused collaborative action.

According to a number of respondents, the dearth of coordinated efforts at the neighborhood level was symptomatic of a larger issue — the general lack of attention to place-based initiatives by funders, elected officials and provider organizations in those communities at the time. The larger initiatives in these communities tended to focus on programmatic or system change efforts, not on more multifaceted neighborhood change. Garry Bliss, who was chief of policy and legislative affairs for the city of Providence during Making Connections, explained:

At the time that Making Connections began, few organizations or community leaders were thinking in terms of place-based strategies. System change was top-down and driven by the state with people looking to the state for leadership, and the state was providing funding.... There was good stand-alone programming, maybe even robust [programmatic] funding, but not funding for broad comprehensive change.

Thus, funding may have been flowing into some neighborhoods, but according to the local respondents, it generally was tied to service-oriented strategies rather than to more comprehensive, coordinated place-based approaches. Moreover, the respondents in our study indicated that, even when the goal of an initiative was broader change in a neighborhood, decisions were often made without the input of residents or other stakeholders in affected neighborhoods, or the targeted neighborhood and populations had limited opportunity to provide input.

If residents were offered more extensive opportunity for input in designing an initiative, it was seen as an exception rather than the norm for the community. Carolyn Gatz, a Louisville economic and workforce development consultant, commented on that city's efforts to develop and implement an Empowerment Zone strategy in 1996, a few years before Making Connections (this effort was directed at 12 neighborhoods, four of which became the local focus for Making Connections):

That was the first time something like that happened [in Louisville] — a large-scale, community-driven planning process that involved more than a hundred people in development of the strategy. We implemented a number of those strategies in subsequent years through aggressive pursuit of federal grants. But the Empowerment Zone strategy was developed at the 30,000-foot level so to speak, not through on-the-ground [community] organizing like what occurred through Making Connections....

That approach was not a part of the cultural norms or the DNA for decision making or

public policy at that time. We did not have a lot of community-organizing groups or activities. That's one of the things that was most striking in the beginning of Making Connections — as a community, we were pretty much outside the norms in terms of Casey work [i.e., how to conduct the work].

At least in some of the communities, race, culture and language differences seemed to compound the difficulties that residents experienced in having a voice in the initiatives that affected their neighborhoods prior to Making Connections. Sili Savusa, who was a resident leader and community organizer in White Center before and during Making Connections, observed:

There weren't a lot of connections between communities of color, particularly immigrants, and white folks. A lot of decisions and change efforts were disconnected from communities of color.... There weren't a lot of opportunities where we could insert community voice, especially people of color and refugees/immigrants. We lacked access to locally made decisions. The kinds of issues [being addressed by decision makers] at that time were really disconnected from the communities in White Center, especially the diverse populations. That was one of the biggest gaps in terms of trying to make sure the needs of people of color and non-English-speaking populations were met.... [Organizations serving the White Center community] were well-intended and not necessarily trying to exclude, but they didn't know how to include.

Savusa's comments highlight some of the challenges in promoting broader change efforts in communities fragmented by race, class and economics. They also point to the importance of

building inclusionary mechanisms for ongoing community input for programs or initiatives affecting a neighborhood or its population.

Levels of Success

Although the communities' capacities to pursue more comprehensive change efforts prior to Making Connections were limited, it is important to acknowledge that many of their earlier efforts nonetheless did generate some positive outcomes. Twelve of the 19 respondents, representing all seven sites, named efforts preceding the initiative that were seen as producing positive outcomes for children and families. The cited examples covered a wide array of activities: job training and placement efforts, youth services and recreational activities, early childhood and educational programs, crime reduction initiatives, affordable housing projects, supportive services initiatives and family asset-building efforts.

It was noteworthy, however, that several respondents indicated that there were no documented outcomes for some of the earlier efforts. Although they may have been successful, there hadn't been a lot of attention devoted to collecting data and verifying the results of these activities. As explained by Louisville's Gatz: "There were outcomes, but we didn't measure outcomes in the same way that people think about them now." Similarly, Castilla of San Antonio reported: "We saw results, but were we documenting them or collecting data to improve them? No." Hard, also of San Antonio, elaborated: "Our community was still looking at outputs, not root causes. We weren't using disci-

pline around data. We were missing a lot of those pieces."

In addition, even when the outcomes were documented, they generally did not achieve substantial scale, and there were no examples of concentrated community-level outcomes. Five of the respondents specifically commented on the fact that the outcomes achieved were limited, piecemeal and remained at a programmatic rather than neighborhood level.

However, despite these limitations, the fact that there was some prior level of effort and success was seen by a number of the respondents as a factor in what made their community attractive to Casey as a potential site. As Patrick McGuigan, director of the Providence Plan, said: "One of the reasons Providence was chosen by Making Connections is that we had building blocks that they [Casey] wanted to scale up." Likewise, Elizabeth Ryan, a resident activist in Indianapolis, observed: "They [Casey] could see we had little pieces popping up; they said, 'Something can come from this,' because we were starting to try. My impression is that they saw something in us. We could grow, organize and make something happen."

Nonetheless, the community stakeholders had not been satisfied with their prior level of success. Respondents explained that this is why they were so excited about the possibilities that the Making Connections initiative offered to address the needs of their "tough neighborhoods" over a 10-year period.

THE CURRENT CHANGE CAPACITIES IN THE COMMUNITIES

When asked about the evolution of their change capacities during the 10-year period of Making Connections, all 19 respondents indicated that their community's overall capacity to articulate and implement a community-level change agenda and to achieve results had significantly improved. In comparing their current capacities to those prior to Making Connections, respondents used language such as "dramatically better" and "increased very significantly and substantially."

The respondents also were asked about specific core capacities. The following summarizes common patterns reported across the communities.

- ♦ Fifteen of the 19 respondents interviewed indicated that their community was experiencing increased levels of collaboration among providers and across stakeholders.
- ♦ Fifteen respondents also reported improvements in their community's use of data to inform the local change efforts.
- ♦ Thirteen respondents indicated their community now has an institutional home (or homes) for ongoing change efforts.
- ♦ Twelve respondents noted that the willingness and ability to engage residents had improved in their community.
- ♦ Twelve respondents also reported improved capacity to move from demonstration efforts to larger scale (via wider replication and/or policy and system change).

- ♦ Eleven respondents indicated that their community's ability to articulate a change agenda and promote a common vision for change had improved.
- ♦ Ten respondents indicated that they have seen improvements in their community's capacity to leverage other resources for the change efforts.

Below, we discuss each of these areas.

Details on Reported Improvements in Change Capacities

INCREASED COLLABORATION AND INCLUSIVENESS: Representatives from all seven sites reported that community leaders, provider organizations and other local stakeholders exhibited greater commitment to collaboration than in the period preceding Making Connections. Henrietta Muñoz of United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County, for

example, commented on how such collaboration has become more of the norm in her community: "Leaders are now saying that their efforts are weak without the support of others. That is a big result." In addition to a commitment to the principle of collaboration, respondents also said that their communities have become more effective in actually carrying out collaborative, coordinated efforts. Rob Denson, president of Des Moines Area Community College, provided one example:

We now have the skills, and we know how to do it [i.e., collaboration]. [For] the Evelyn Davis Center for Working Families, [for example,] the Central Iowa workgroup raised \$600,000 and created this organization. They bought a building and redeveloped it. There are 20-30 organizations that work with families that come in [to the center]. We're not doing



each other's work but bringing people to the table. We all do things differently, but we brought everybody together.

Interviewees also indicated that partnerships and community “tables” now have more varied and diverse sets of players engaged than before Making Connections. Dana Jackson Thompson, executive director of the Network Center for Community Change in Louisville, noted, “I see people at the table that wouldn’t have been there a decade ago — residents and grassroots leadership.” In addition to the inclusion of residents, respondents mentioned the engagement of representatives of the business community and others who traditionally had not been invited to be part of these efforts in the past. Dennis Campa, former director of San Antonio’s Community Initiatives Department, offered:

[Collaboration in San Antonio] is tremendously strong. The Making Connections effort helped bring nonprofits, faith-based organizations, higher education institutions and businesses together. People are working collaboratively to move an agenda around higher education and grade-level reading...It's a very rich prize, if you pick the right groups — [you need] to have people who want to work together to improve conditions for people and families. The government and the school districts want to be a part of it without having to lead it.

In some communities, the commitment to collaboration and inclusiveness is still seen as somewhat tenuous, however. Lena Hackett, a consultant in Indianapolis, judged that collaboration in that city was “fairly high, but suffers from people who go back to

old behaviors in times of stress.” She added, though, that “the intent is to collaborate.” Other respondents noted that some partnerships and tables still find it difficult to have the hard conversations that are often necessary to uncover and address thornier underlying problems.¹² On this point, Julie Fugenschuh, a former Making Connections site coordinator in Des Moines, observed, “Sometimes I think, in communities like ours, collaboration happens at a surface level — you don’t rock the boat. It’s a status quo system. If you want to rock the boat, you’re not [wanted] at the table.”

A couple resident leaders interviewed reiterated this view and expressed the opinion that the role of residents at these tables is still problematic, especially when they advocate a different approach or solution from what the provider establishment may want.

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE USE OF DATA AND COMMITMENT TO COLLECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY: Respondents for all seven sites reported that their community’s capacity to use data has increased substantially since the commencement of Making Connections.¹³ For example, according to Hard in San Antonio:

Back in 1999, we weren't sure what to look at. Now, there's a big effort to look beyond symptoms to causes. That's one of the big things — the causal factors rather than symptoms. Another big thing is data analysis...what is the data saying? What is the evidence? People started asking questions about the data. Having discussions about the data is now happening on a regular basis.

Representatives from all seven sites reported that community leaders, provider organizations and other local stakeholders exhibited greater commitment to collaboration than in the period preceding Making Connections.

The respondents indicated that more organizations now understand the importance of having a robust data capacity. Respondents report that data usage is seen as a regular and expected part of program management for any organization or initiative. Mike Kromrey, executive director of the community-organizing group Colorado Together, indicated that, from his perspective, “A big success [of the Making Connections experience] was groups like ours learning that we could and should use research to inform a change agenda.” Data capacity also is viewed more broadly, not just for reporting to funders or for one-time evaluation but also for assessing needs, setting targets, monitoring progress and informing midcourse corrections. Hackett in Indianapolis commented:

Now it’s a natural reaction to look for data and ask for it if it’s not there. It’s also a condition of funding. Right now, the City-County Council is working on a reentry study. They spent the last six months gathering information from content experts, people affected by the issue, etc., to see what are the best practices, where do we want to be, how do we get to the population level and what are the indicators of success. In the past, they would’ve had a few people come in and testify, then write a nice report. [The capacity to use data] is natural now, but it wouldn’t have been prior to Making Connections.

Similarly, Fugenschuh from Des Moines observed:

You see it across the board....It’s interesting to see people asking for data at meetings now. You can’t argue with data. It

has made the nonprofit work more of a business venture. You have to have outcomes and be accountable. You can’t just feel good about the work — you have to be monitoring to make sure you have the impact that you intend to.

The increased attention to data capacity went hand in hand with what Dana Jackson Thompson of Louisville characterized as the “relentless focus on results that Making Connections brought.” During the course of the initiative, Casey introduced the Results-Based Accountability™ (RBA)¹⁴ framework to a broad array of stakeholders in each of the Making Connections sites. Casey invested in extensive RBA training for the sites because it represented a concrete technique to operationalize the results approach. Campa noted how the results orientation became endemic in San Antonio, in part as a result of the RBA training, and led to other local data capacity enhancements:

The Results-Based Accountability work that Casey brought...it became embedded in the city and leadership-in-action work around family economic success issues. From that, a number of [other] data [activities] arose. The National Neighborhood Indicators Project [which provides access to neighborhood-level data] began to take root, with sponsorship from Casey. Universities and other groups with data capacities have started to play a bigger role and are sharing data....In the public sector, [officials] are making decisions based on data. They’re looking at what the status of the population is and what an effective intervention would be.

Bill Taft commented on a similar cultural shift in Indianapolis:

That is a big area of impact — Results-Based Accountability is something that became a standard for how plans and priorities are articulated and designed for follow-up. The Great Indianapolis Neighborhoods Initiative’s quality-of-life plans are an example. The goals were articulated in an RBA structure with some technical assistance from Casey. It was measured by the neighborhoods as they made progress. The idea of that [using RBA] and the technical assistance provided by Casey continues; neighborhoods are using it as they develop [additional] plans. The expectation in the design of those plans is that they can measure the results.

Fugenschuh also noted how Results-Based Accountability can help facilitate the hard but necessary conversations: “Des Moines is very much a polite community. They don’t want to say [to each other], ‘What you’re doing is not working.’ But the results help those conversations to happen, using RBA. That way, it doesn’t become personal; it becomes data-driven.”

Despite the overall improvements in data capacity in the sites, a number of respondents acknowledged that there was still considerable variation in capacity across organizations in many of the communities — with much of the data capacity residing in individual organizations rather than being evenly distributed across the community. Bliss observed for Providence, for example: “We’re beginning to see a two-tiered world — a handful of very high-capacity organizations doing data best practices who can develop their own [data systems and applications]; others are struggling merely to open the front door every day.”

In some sites, respondents report the emergence of more partnering with others to build and share data capacity, in part as a way to address these capacity disparities. Dana Jackson Thompson of Louisville noted: “There’s a lot of capacity and know-how around; if we don’t know how to do it, we can get in touch with someone who can help.” However, this is not universally true across the communities.

We also explored with the respondents whether the improvements in data capacity and the sites’ familiarity with the RBA framework, in combination with the increase in collaborative efforts, were creating a stronger environment of collective accountability among stakeholders in the communities. Respondents for each of the seven sites expressed either that community capacity to embrace collective accountability had increased (seven respondents) or that there was movement in that direction, but it was still a work in progress (seven respondents).¹⁵ The respondents with the most positive views of their communities’ enhanced capacities to embrace collective accountability indicated that community members now understand that each had a role to play in achieving outcomes at scale. As Campa explained relative to San Antonio, “Everyone realizes that they’re only as strong as the weakest link.” Campa added the caveat, however, that “there’s a lot of capacity building needed to make sure everyone is able to move the work forward,” suggesting that a lot more than a commitment to the principle of collective accountability is necessary to ensure that it becomes a standard practice in a community.

In a somewhat similar vein, in discussing the experience in Des Moines, Denson observed, “Yes, we hold each other accountable. We’re at the point where we can, in a productive manner, question each other’s use of funds.”

Denson’s response implies that implementing collective accountability also requires building strong relationships of trust among the stakeholders, an effort that can take considerable time and attention. Nancy Hard in San Antonio also reflected on the process of pursuing collective accountability and impact: “The desire is there. The intent and want is there. But the success, in terms of achievement, is not there. We’re taking intentional steps to get there.”

The respondents who were least positive about the progress their communities were making relative to collective accountability offered a variety of explanations for their assessments. One respondent felt that the higher-capacity organizations in his community were not willing to work with lower-capacity organizations to hold each other accountable. A respondent for another site argued that his community lacked a sufficiently transparent and integrated measurement framework to foster accountability.

Thus, while respondents from all seven communities reported increased data capacity and many interviewees commented on the adoption of the Results-Based Accountability framework by local stakeholders, after 10 years of Casey support and encouragement, these capacities were still siloed to some extent in each of the communities. Consistent

with this, the stakeholders reported that there had been some gains relative to the commitment to collective accountability but acknowledged that it is still far from being a standard practice community-wide.

INSTITUTIONAL HOMES FOR THE CHANGE EFFORTS: Thirteen of the 16 interviewees who answered the relevant question indicated that an institutional home currently exists for the ongoing change efforts in their community and that such capacity had increased during Making Connections.¹⁶ Kromrey of Denver noted: “There are exponentially stronger homes for people to continue to act on their interests. There’s a bigger ecosystem of groups able to take action on behalf of low-income communities.”

The respondents reported that some of the organizations now serving as the institutional home for the continuing change efforts in their community were formed as part of the Making Connections experience (such as White Center Community Development Association, or CDA), whereas others already existed but had help from Making Connections and other entities (such as local foundations) to increase their capacity to take on this role. In discussing CDA’s role and capacity, Savusa commented:

I really believe we are the home for [supporting the ongoing change agenda]. It’s our ability to not only move with the changes but also to hold that space so we’re not leaving folks behind. Are we good? Yes. The best? No. But we do understand and have the patience to work the way people need it to happen.



Some respondents observed that there were multiple organizations serving as institutional homes for the various change efforts in their community, with the home depending on the specific change agenda. A variety of entities were identified by respondents as serving as local institutional homes for change — community-based organizations, public-private partnerships, the local United Way, the housing authority, community foundations, the school district, the city administration.¹⁷ Two interviewees expressed the view that, in the interest of promoting inclusiveness and the maximum leveraging of resources, there shouldn’t be a single home for change efforts in a community. That is, they believed that there would be more change activity, more resources devoted to those activities and more accountability if multiple entities in a community served as institutional homes for change efforts.

A number of respondents also voiced concerns that, while there were institutional homes for change efforts in their communities, the future funding picture for those entities was not entirely clear, particularly for the smaller community-based organizations. These ob-

servations highlighted the sometimes tenuous nature of this particular capacity in a community, especially during a period of funding cutbacks.

INCREASED RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT: Twelve of the 17 interviewees who answered the question on resident engagement indicated that their community’s capacity in this area had improved during Making Connections. However, there was considerable variation regarding the level of progress that had been made in this area and the extent to which resident engagement had become a standard practice for all initiatives in the community.

Among the respondents who felt that substantial progress had been made was Gatz of Louisville:

I think that over this time period, 12-13 years, since Making Connections started in the early 2000s, [resident engagement] has increased very significantly and substantially. There’s a legacy from Making Connections...that’s very much alive and now part of the culture in Louisville: the whole idea of resident engagement and resident voice...engaging residents in an ongoing way to guide neighborhood devel-

opment. That value is incorporated into the community, into how we function and work. I don't think you could do a significant reinvestment effort [now] without the community's voice being engaged and involved. The norm has shifted. There's lots of evidence for that.

Similarly, Hackett in Indianapolis observed:

[Resident engagement] increased exponentially. I think that it didn't exist at all before Making Connections; now it is a natural question that occurs to folks all the time. Where's the consumer input? There are now formal and informal networks [of residents] that are naturally invited to the table and are highly skilled based on trainings they received in Making Connections and after.

Savusa provided an eloquent description of how resident-engagement capacity had evolved in White Center and some of the results that it has achieved:

I would say that in regards to resident engagement and leadership...we do that really well as an organization and community. A lot of that is the work and the experience we learned through Making Connections. For example, one of the things we laid out when Making Connections first came to town was our priorities — education was big. We wanted strong schools and to increase parent involvement and engagement in the schools. Not only did we elect two community members to the school board, but we developed coffee hours for families to come in and meet staff. [There was] more building relationships with teachers and parents and building capacity to work together. We also opened up the community

budget process around the school budget. We cohosted a series of budget meetings. We provided translation and transportation; it was packed. The parents said, "It's so nice to come to a meeting where people aren't fighting and to learn how the schools make decisions about how money would be spent." It was liberating for parents, and the model was replicated in other areas...We were happy to work with the [school] districts. We told them if you want to work with the community, don't just flash data charts — let's change the language we use and have interpreters on hand to explain what it takes to put a budget together and make decisions. I'm telling you, it's one of the best processes I've seen. It's night and day from [how] the Seattle school districts [were communicating with the community prior to Making Connections]. The hardest component is parent engagement...At the heart [of what we were doing] was, "How do we build these relationships so people can have real conversations about what they want, and where parents can feel safe to ask questions?"

Across the respondents, however, the assessments of the progress relative to resident engagement were not always so positive. The interviewees' responses revealed, for instance, that there were some substantial differences in how stakeholders define resident engagement. According to the responses, some local stakeholders, particularly some service providers or educational institutions, appear to equate the involvement of neighborhood organizations as being the same as resident engagement. Moreover, where residents actually have a seat at the table and a direct voice in decision making, it's clear they've had to work very hard to achieve that position.

According to the responses, some local stakeholders, particularly some service providers or educational institutions, appear to equate the involvement of neighborhood organizations as being the same as resident engagement.

For example, Ryan described her experience and that of other resident activists in Indianapolis:

Because we proved things on small efforts that proved our leadership ability — [the ability to articulate] our wants and the ability to stick with something that we want to change — you see other groups and the city listening to us in a way they wouldn't have 10 years ago.

Nonetheless, as we've previously noted, some of the local informants felt that resident participation on multipartner tables still is only tolerated to the extent that the residents don't rock the boat. One respondent also was concerned that insufficient attention has been devoted to building the capacity of organizations that support resident engagement on an ongoing basis, as opposed to training particular resident leaders. This individual worried that if those trained residents moved from the community, the local resident-engagement capacity would diminish appreciably.

MOVEMENT TO LARGER SCALE: Respondents from the majority of the sites reported improved capacity to move from demonstration efforts to larger scale. In fact, all the respondents to this line of inquiry indicated that their community was either already taking their change efforts to scale or was in the process of addressing the issue of scaling up their efforts.¹⁸

According to the interviewees' responses, a considerable amount of what the respondents see as the movement to scale is occurring by taking practices or approaches developed through the Making Connections experience and

replicating them in other initiatives in the communities. As part of this, respondents credit Making Connections with teaching local stakeholders how to scale up efforts, an expertise that the stakeholders are now applying to other community initiatives. For example, Muñoz in San Antonio noted:

In the second phase [of Making Connections], we created a smaller pool of people we'd work with — three schools in the Edgewood School District [as a demonstration effort]. We were able to do comparisons [of student and school performance], and by the time we were done with that phase, we were able to take to scale the work we did with those three schools to the entire school district — 10 schools. We focused the dollars and resources there....What we learned [in Making Connections] is being used in the Promise Neighborhoods [educational initiative] programming. We're starting small and learning lessons and then will take those lessons to scale. The San Antonio 2020 program is doing the same thing.

Similarly, Hackett commented on the broader adoption of the Making Connections way of working in Indianapolis and the increased attention being devoted to scaling up activities:

Since Making Connections, there are practices and philosophies woven into how people do work. Some are aware of this change in how they're doing work; some are not aware. But practices have changed. And as a way of doing business, people are looking at how they take small efforts to scale.

Taft, executive director of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)

in Indianapolis, offered more specifics on some of the scaling-up efforts in that city, in terms of how stakeholders seek to provide services to families and address neighborhood-level change:

The Center for Working Families... went from a single site to seven sites. It was adopted by United Way as a regional priority. The Great Indianapolis Neighborhoods [Initiative] is another example. It was influenced by Casey. It took neighborhood[-level] quality-of-life [planning] processes and has become the norm.

Interestingly, although respondents offered a few illustrations of efforts (and successes) at promoting broader policy or system change — such as the restructuring of the workforce development system in Des Moines — for the most part, the examples of moving to scale provided by the interviewees focused on replication, moving practices from one to multiple sites.

ARTICULATION OF A COMMON VISION:

Representatives from all seven sites reported that their communities' ability to articulate a change agenda and promote a common vision had improved since the commencement of Making Connections. Gatz, for example, described how the capacity to promote a common vision for change had grown in Louisville:

A theory of change — people here know what that is now. I equate that shift in how we work to increased capacity, and it's significantly higher than before Making Connections. A couple of other things that are tangentially related to Making Connections — the workforce development system is [now] oriented



to sector-based training for low- and mid-skilled workers. The whole system is reoriented, in part, because we proved the effectiveness [of that strategy] in the health care industry [as part of Making Connections]. Also, Casey was part of a philanthropic consortium backing the Greater Louisville Project, which is a civic agenda-setting project supported by [the consortium] for 12 years. [The Greater Louisville Project] has articulated “Deep Drivers of Change,” a high-level vision and goals for how Louisville can become a more competitive community by focusing on education, growing 21st-century jobs, increasing quality of place.

A number of other respondents similarly noted change agendas that had been developed in their communities, as well as successful efforts to engage a spectrum of local stakeholders around a common vision for change. However, one of the more interesting responses on the issue of community capacity to articulate a change agenda came from Indianapolis’ Ryan, who described how the resident leadership training offered by Casey improved the capacity of the residents themselves to shape a change agenda for their neighborhoods:

Casey brought in training for residents. We learned organizational skills, how to put together meetings and [how to articulate] what you want. It was [connected with] a particular initiative called Study Circles [in which residents come together to discuss neighborhood issues and identify possible solutions]. I worked in that and the resident training. What I did was bring [the lessons from the resident training] back to people in the neighborhood. At that point, I became a neighborhood leader — people would talk to me about things. On my block, we started organizing and making real change, and [other] people wanted to know what we did [to have that success]....I would go out and talk or work with somebody on a block. It was totally different than saying, “Come out to this meeting and hear me talk.” Instead, it was, “we’re going to come out together and hang out, and we’re all going to talk about what we want to see in our neighborhood.” The first [approach] is with [a predetermined] agenda...and the other is building the agenda with the people that are there. That’s how we started working with people in the neighborhood. It doesn’t work with everyone, but that’s how things are being done. If they don’t feel [that they’re being] heard or a part of the process, they don’t come out....But if

we come up with the pieces [i.e., the plan] together, instead of just two people coming out [to a meeting], we had a dozen or more. That is commonplace now in our neighborhood....Some of the energy we built led [representatives from other neighborhoods] to come out to see how we do it and take it back to their neighborhoods. We start by doing large neighborhood gatherings with 100-200 people.... [We'd focus on] a large piece that brings everyone in and break into smaller groups where they can focus on their passion, instead of telling people where to go and what to do.¹⁹

Two things are noteworthy about Ryan's description of her experience in bringing residents together around a change agenda. The first, to which Ryan herself alluded, was the fact that the change agenda was being collaboratively developed, rather than the community being asked to mobilize around a vision for change that had already been defined. Second, the process that Ryan describes for creating a resident-driven agenda represents a teaching moment in which residents learn a set of skills that can be applied to a series of initiatives over time and in different neighborhoods, rather than being tied to a single change effort, a single geographic area or a single point in time.

LEVERAGING OTHER RESOURCES: Most of the interviewees responding to the question on leveraging believe that their community has improved its ability to access funding, technical assistance, new partners and other key resources for local change efforts, at least to a degree.²⁰ Campa described, for example, how San Antonio has been able to



continue the momentum — and build on the infrastructure and collaborative spirit — fostered by the Making Connections experience to attract funding for additional initiatives:

There's been good work — like [the] Promise Neighborhoods and Choice Neighborhoods [grants] — as well as the Family-Centered Community Change effort. It's indicative that over the last decade or so, the community has learned how to come together and put up resources to support their work.

Likewise, Gatz talked about the improved capacity of Louisville to secure funding for efforts addressing the needs of low-income residents:

The fact is that other local philanthropic foundations, which before Making Connections never had made grants for purposes like resident engagement, [are now participating with] the community foundation and supporting some ongoing partnerships in this work. Several of them [also] have come together to create the funders' collaborative that supports sector-based workforce development for low-skilled workers through the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. That's the

type of investment that hadn't occurred before and is a tangible example of that shift [in funding focus].

Kromrey also commented on how the Making Connections experience led to increased support for efforts such as resident engagement:

This is another big [area of] success. The short answer is that Making Connections in Denver [was] a transformational experience [for] the core team of people that happened to be the Denver Foundation, the city and county of Denver, myself, others....The really amazing thing is that the Piton Foundation decided resident engagement and organizing would be a priority. They became the center of subsequent efforts that leveraged millions of dollars, created philanthropic partnerships [where] a set of foundations saw this as a critical part of community change....Now others are taking this up, but Piton was at the center....They put their own money in and leveraged others....Also, something very important happened here around leverage — embedded philanthropy — all came from changes that occurred from risk-taking and influencing each other that started when we learned how to

partner together in a different way; we became much better with bigger capacity.

Fugenschuh focused on Des Moines' improved capacity to take advantage of technical assistance and information on best practices — and to think more creatively about financing of change efforts:

One of the greatest things that [Making Connections] brought to the table is expertise. When the community realized that bringing in experts from around the country can really impact our ability to move forward, we started using that a lot. Also, looking at new and unique ways to fund programs from multiple sources has become more of a way of doing business here.

Similarly, Cecilia Broder of Denver reflected on how local stakeholders in that city have been able to apply expertise, developed through engagement with Casey during Making Connections, to build support and attract partners for its change agenda:

Casey also did a great job partnering with United Way Worldwide and sharing their thinking — it helped germinate broader thinking both ways [with both organizations]. That was very beneficial for us. We had a conversation early on [with Casey] about how to engage business leaders.... That spurred us to see how to engage businesses around early childhood learning. Mile High United Way is one of the founding partners of EPIC [Executives Partnering to Invest in Children]. Through our partnership with EPIC, 200-plus business leaders convened for a luncheon to hear from Michael Eskew, former chief executive officer of UPS [and board chair of the Casey Foundation], and from Ralph Smith [from Casey] on

the importance of early childhood to the business sector.... Now business leaders are involved and becoming early childhood champions through EPIC. That's another outcome of the Casey work — [building] partnerships around things going on.... lots of leverage and influence.

Based on the respondents' comments, the communities are reportedly using a variety of strategies to leverage additional resources for their ongoing change efforts. Some communities have been able to use the infrastructure (such as local data capacity) and expertise developed during Making Connections to successfully compete for and attract new external sources of funding to continue the change work. Other communities also have found ways to better align or reallocate local funding sources to support the change activities; their experiences in Making Connections taught them about the importance of investing in particular strategies and the necessity of coordinated funding for those strategies. Similarly, some respondents note that their communities now have a far better appreciation for — and ability to access and use — technical assistance on best practices. While not a monetary resource, technical assistance is now understood as a mechanism for learning how to achieve greater impact with existing resources.

Stakeholders' Perceptions Regarding Most Valuable Capacities

According to the interviews, each of the seven communities had acquired (or enhanced) a variety of core capacities that the respondents saw as strengthening their community's overall ability to ar-

ticulate and pursue a local change agenda. As a follow-up to the questions on the individual capacities, we asked the respondents to identify the particular improvements that they felt have been most important or influential. The capacities most frequently cited were:

— 1 —

A STRONGER CADRE OF COMMUNITY LEADERS (INCLUDING RESIDENTS) AND PRACTITIONERS TO CONDUCT THE WORK: Respondents emphasized the tremendous value in having stronger, better-informed leadership throughout the community — not only elected officials and agency heads but also resident leaders — to guide the ongoing change efforts. Respondents also commented on how Making Connections had been a training ground for a variety of community members to acquire expertise and hone their skills, which they have applied to new endeavors, locally and nationally. Broder from Denver noted: “The Making Connections investments in individuals have stayed with those people. You can tell that even if they’ve moved on, they took the Casey thinking with them to their next work in the broader system.”

Similarly, Watt from White Center identified a variety of individuals who had been active in Making Connections and who have taken the lessons from that experience to other venues:

The then [King County] executive became deputy director of HUD [the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] and took a number of ideas [with him] about working with communities and changing neighborhoods

across America....The long-time chair of the [Making Connections] partners group then served as chair of the local community foundation and now [is] the chair of the Casey Family Programs board [in Seattle], and brought knowledge about how communities change and how hard it is and how long it takes.... One key consultant went on to be staff lead at United Way of King County.... The Highline [school] superintendent [who had been very engaged in Making Connections] became superintendent of the education services district...and took with him a deeper understanding of what it takes to serve low-income communities more effectively.

— 2 —

ADOPTION OF NEW WAYS OF THINKING AND APPROACHING THE WORK: Respondents described how they’ve learned to take a more holistic approach that recognizes both the importance of addressing the family as a whole and of integrating multiple strategies — resident engagement, social services, education and workforce, economic and community development — for a community-focused approach to strengthen neighborhoods and improve the lives of children and families. As Taft of Indianapolis explained:

The Making Connections emphasis on investing in place and people was a framework that made a difference in Indianapolis and continues to be the way we think about communities. Where [initiatives previously] were more focused on people, they are thinking about the places they were working in now and respond by building capacity in those areas. For those [initiatives] that were

more focused on place, they are thinking more broadly about investing in people for an integrated strategy — bringing these two worlds together.

Dana Jackson Thompson of Louisville also discussed how the “population-level focus” brought by Making Connections fostered a transformation in how stakeholders think about setting aspirations for local initiatives and expectations for achieving results at scale.

Bliss of Providence explained how the Making Connections experience showed local stakeholders the efficiencies that could be achieved through coordinated efforts that build on existing assets:

Directly coming out of [Making Connections] are three Centers for Working Families — we call them “family success centers” — where before we had zero. The way we approached that came from the change in thinking as a result of Making Connections; in 1999, we would have created a new organization and hired a new executive director and board. Instead, we took the approach to look at the existing assets, identify folks headed in that direction [who] are “almost there” in terms of capacity. Instead of starting from scratch, you take scarce resources and provide coordination, technical assistance and a data system to ensure folks are working on the same strategy and same results. That this happened, and how [it happened], was influenced by Making Connections.

Respondents also discussed the confidence that stakeholders now have in their own ability to do the work and address problems, in part because they feel they have the tools and methods

necessary to be effective in those efforts. Denson of Des Moines put it succinctly: “I think the biggest [improvement] is that we proved we can do it....We have the confidence to do anything and take on any issue coming down the road.”

— 3 —

MORE SOPHISTICATED DATA AND EVALUATION CAPACITY: In discussing the importance of this capacity, respondents also pointed proudly to the fact that they now have the capacity to look beyond inputs and outputs and anecdotal data to more systematic evidence regarding outcomes and the effectiveness of practices and policies. Muñoz of San Antonio noted: “We used to do head counts — how many people enrolled, etc.? Now we’re asking how programs are impacting people and how people are better off. The data is difficult to obtain, but it leads to rich information.”

One interesting aspect of this list of most important capacities is that the first two items represent different characterizations of capacity than what had previously been discussed with the local informants during the interviews. Nonetheless, it’s probably fair to assume that, at least in part, they build off of the other capacities that were developed or enhanced during the past decade. For example, the quality of leadership within the communities is very likely to have been strongly influenced by the exposure to new strategies and best practices such as Results-Based Accountability, as well as by the resident leadership training that occurred as part of Making Connections.

Although not mentioned as frequently as the capacities listed above, the importance of a community’s capacity to address issues of race, class and power was also cited by a number of the local respondents. This topic tended to be raised by the community activists, whose work often focuses on promoting inclusion and power-sharing.²¹

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FACTORS THAT FOSTERED CAPACITY IMPROVEMENTS

After they described the enhancements to their community's change capacities, interviewees were asked to identify the factors and experiences that they felt were most instrumental in fostering these improvements.

Although respondents were encouraged during the interviews to name any other concurrent initiatives or factors that helped to promote the increases in capacity, overwhelmingly, the most common key factors cited related to the training and support provided by Casey over the course of Making Connections.²² Specifically, the respondents emphasized the information on best practices and tools and the leadership training provided by Casey, and the ongoing reinforcement for certain practices and principles during the 10-year initiative — such as the emphasis on collaboration, the focus on results and managing by data, the importance of resident engagement, etc. — that resulted in these modes of doing business becoming second nature to local stakeholders.

Regarding the sharing of information on best practice, Campa of San Antonio observed:

Casey presented good data that these things [i.e., the best practices being introduced] had worked before. Casey also supported peer matching; they took residents, nonprofit leaders and government [officials] to other communities to see how

[these other communities] addressed issues so they could take it back to San Antonio. That [experience] was powerful enough to help make the change. For example, the city had three funding cycles — the Community Development Block Grant, Community Services Block Grant and General Fund — [that each] had different time periods during the year, and nonprofits had to apply three different times; the funding wasn't coordinated. Through Casey's support, we visited a couple of communities that had brought those things together under one RFP. Now [the city of San Antonio is] looking at buying results for families, rather than funding an agency. Until we were informed with data and allowed to see others doing it, [this sort of change] wasn't going to happen. Now nonprofits apply once every two years, and funding is geared [toward] looking at results like youth development, community safety nets, etc., rather than spreading it all across the board.

On the Casey emphasis on collaboration, Watt remarked:

The [Making Connections] partners group that was assembled had representatives from the county, corporations, schools, health departments, nonprofits, faith-based [organizations], etc., and at its heart had a theme of "we're all working together and contributing in our own unique way, and we'll value that work regardless of the dollar amount invested." That spirit and dedication encouraged people to use their connections to get people to put more resources into White Center.

Hard of San Antonio, after noting how Casey had created a "learning community across the country," focused on Casey's emphasis on managing by data:

The other thing, in terms of [factors promoting] the improvement in capacities



and practices, was Casey's and Bob's [referring to Foundation Vice President Bob Giloth] attention to data and data-driven decision making. There was a great introduction [to the underlying concepts around managing by data], and they stayed with it. Making Connections spent 10-plus years getting that in place at all levels in the communities. They had longevity in the training and development, and a relentless pursuit.

Like several other local interviewees, McGuigan of Providence acknowledged the value of the technical assistance and emphasis on best practices that Casey brought. He also emphasized the importance of the Making Connections funding that helped bring people to the table, which created a forum for stakeholders to start thinking about doing things in new and different ways:

Making Connections brought money, and that was really important. They brought data and technical assistance but also hard dollars — we had ideas that [now] could be funded. We could fund a pilot to see if it could work. [After Making Connections,] Casey money went away at the same time other money went away, which makes it harder...[During Making Connections,] the fact that people came together and took it seriously [was a big deal]. If I run an organization, I can say we're going to do our own thing, but in Providence, lots of folks decided that we're going to do something different, we're going to sit together and work stuff out and not just do our own thing. We're going to share information in ways we haven't before; we'll reach an agreement about what it means and what we're going to do about it. We didn't even know about chronic absenteeism until the data was collected.

We created a new indicator around it and looked at it at all levels and [found that] it's an enormous predictor of other things. People said, "I hadn't thought about that before." The schools started trying different approaches to address it; now there's a whole campaign.

Although named less often, the other two catalytic factors most frequently cited by respondents were "building off of other capacities" (mentioned by eight of the 18 respondents) and "strong leadership" from elected officials, directors of organizations and other local leaders (noted by five respondents). What was particularly interesting about the former was that most of the comments regarding building off of other capacities related to resident engagement. That is, respondents believed that once residents became mobilized and more active in advocating around their needs, local providers and elected officials saw themselves as more accountable for results and would take steps accordingly to improve capacities and performance.

The other two catalytic factors most frequently cited by respondents as fostering improvements were "building off of other capacities" (including resident engagement) and "strong leadership" from elected officials, directors of organizations and other local leaders.

EVIDENCE OF BETTER OUTCOMES

The improvements in community capacity were never intended, either by Casey or the local stakeholders, to represent an end in themselves. Rather, such improvements were seen as mechanisms that, either directly or indirectly, would result in better outcomes for children, families and neighborhoods.

Accordingly, given the range of improved capacities reported by the interviewees, we asked them if they were also seeing better outcomes resulting from these capacities. All but a few of the interviewees were able to provide concrete examples of what they reported as improved outcomes for children, families and neighborhoods that they felt had been fostered by the improved capacities. The respondents' examples of improved outcomes covered a wide gamut of substantive areas, including early educational advancement, reduced student absenteeism and improved academic performance, increased employment connections, income and asset gains, decreases in criminal recidivism rates, and improved neighborhood facilities and quality-of-life features such as increased access to affordable housing, recreational facilities and cultural amenities, as well as an expanded range of goods and services available through local businesses. Jerry Abramson, for example, discussed how the workforce development capacity and asset-building infrastructure enhanced as part of Making Connections have benefitted Louisville's low-income residents:

Making Connections...was a catalyst for the jobs pipelines. Working with the WIB [Workforce Investment Board], we developed a pipeline that was used as a vehicle for community outreach. That led to hiring [residents] in health care employment, as well as getting some of the individuals into the community college system to provide them with enhanced skills that gave them opportunities for jobs and placement...

Making Connections also established strong partnerships to help families build assets. There's an organization focused on the EITC [earned income tax credit] campaign with the city and the United Way. We returned \$25 million in tax refunds to residents...We also used data that was collected by Making Connections to influence policy...The Social Compact study funded by Making Connections and the city showed us...low-income families' lack of access to mainstream funding. [Work-

ing with the city, providers and financial institutions, we] helped people open checking accounts and build their credit rating.

Taft in Indianapolis likewise noted some of the positive outcomes relative to employment and family economic gains that have been realized, as well as improvements in the facilities available to residents in the neighborhoods where Making Connections was active:

At the Center for Working Families, there've been specific outcomes [achieved]. The number of people connected to jobs, growth in incomes and improvements in assets has grown in a significant way. At the Mind Trust [a collaborative effort to promote innovative reform in public schools], there's a larger number of high-quality education institutions for families in those neighborhoods. There's also more of an em-



phasis on quality of life in terms of access to cultural and recreational amenities, affordable housing and goods and services provided by businesses in those areas.

Keys, also from Indianapolis, described some of the improvements that have resulted from resident empowerment and activism in one of that city's Making Connections neighborhoods: "One major result is [that] we got a lot of roads repaired. A neighborhood resident did a study of our infrastructure. We created data and showed [city officials] that our neighborhood had the worst roads and got the city to come in [and fix them]."

In connection with the educational activities that had been pursued in White Center, Savusa described improved outcomes relative to increased parental involvement, decreases in student absences, higher graduation rates and college enrollments. Savusa also pointed to improvements in White Center's neighborhood facilities due to resident voice:

We just [recently] organized with local residents to ensure that the local library would be built in the area. Some folks tried to get it moved further south, outside the community. I made calls and residents testified at the library executive council meetings. They [i.e., the library council] voted unanimously to put [the library] on parks property [in White Center] — it was cheaper for the library, and now a previously unused building is getting used.

Watt described other improvements in services and facilities for White Center residents related to Making Connections activities and the relationships and capacities built:

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation paid for construction and operations of the Educare Center as a direct result of their being looped into the Making Connections effort. The housing authority was going to do Hope VI anyway, but because they were a part [of Making Connections], they did it at the heart of the neighborhood with the full collaboration of the neighborhood. [The resulting Hope VI redevelopment] provides great housing for mixed-income [families], an upgraded Boys & Girls Club and a business incubator... The school district passed its first construction levy as a result of organizing in the neighborhood. Two new neighborhood schools were built — high-quality and beautiful — serving low-income kids. The CDA, in partnership with another group, built family housing for low-income families from land owned by King County; it also was part of Making Connections.

As indicated by the above examples, respondents cited a variety of results relative to improved outcomes in the seven communities, and some of the accomplishments mentioned represented concentrated community-level outcomes and/or had achieved some degree of scale.

However, it also must be acknowledged that none of the interviewees could provide evidence of their communities having yet moved the needle relative to population-level outcomes in the target neighborhoods. As Gatz observed: "There are some outcomes [in Louisville], but it has not turned the tide." Respondents offered a range of perspectives on why this was the case, as will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES AND THE LIMITS OF EXISTING CAPACITIES

One reason cited by the respondents about why population-level outcomes have not yet occurred is the fact that the interventions are still evolving and growing and have not reached a saturation level or even a tipping point in the targeted geographic areas. In part, this should not be surprising. Building and institutionalizing the necessary infrastructure and policies, reversing the effects of long-term disinvestment and system dysfunction and overcoming skepticism and distrust take time — perhaps decades rather than years.²³

However, in some of the sites, respondents indicated that the process of moving to scale is also impeded because the improved capacities and practices remain largely limited to a few high-performing organizations rather than being adopted more broadly across the community. Similarly, in some of the communities, interviewees report that only a subset of the local leaders (e.g., elected officials, providers, resident activists) have fully embraced the improved practices and are committed to building and sustaining the capacities on an ongoing basis. Consistent with these patterns, some respondents also report that results accountability is isolated in individual community organizations, rather than being taken up in coordinated efforts among organizations; this limits the impact of the efforts of these organizations individually and collectively.

Another challenge to realizing population-level outcomes is the tension between a place-based change focus (at a neighborhood level) and a system change focus. Although many of the stakeholders report an improved capacity in their communities to pursue broader system change as a way to achieve scale, communities have found it difficult to frame system change in a way that results in sufficient concentration of resources on place. When an improved practice that has been demonstrated at a neighborhood level is adopted on a broader geographic level through system or policy change, there may be more resources devoted to that practice. However, when resources are distributed over a much larger area, the level of resources and effort focused on particular neighborhoods may not be as intensive as under the original demonstration.

According to the local stakeholders, another factor that negatively impacted efforts to achieve population-level outcomes was the recession. Although the impact of the recession varied somewhat among the Making Connections sites, in many of the communities, the economic downturn both increased the need for services and supports and reduced the resources available to address those needs. Local respondents in those communities noted that the downturn and cuts in funding (as public revenues declined) made it exceedingly difficult to maintain existing infrastructure, much less expand efforts. McGuigan of Providence explained:

The economy [is terrible]. So much is tied to the economy....The context is so fundamentally different [from the context during Making Connections]. We could be doing all the things in the



world, but if the hole is deeper, I don't know that we'd have results to show. There were 1,200-1,300 licensed child care places; now that's [been] cut in half. We have less capacity to serve kids. In kindergarten, more kids are showing up with no exposure to formal education. The state government cut funding, and the economy [stinks]....I make a distinction between articulation [of a change agenda] and execution. You can have all the will in the world, but without funding, it will be hard to show results.

Interestingly, the responses of interviewees indicate that the economic downturn can cut both ways — in some cases undermining maintenance of the core capacities that have been built up, but in other instances reinforcing them. For example, in the view of some interviewees, the overall reduction in resources due to funding cuts has created an incentive for providers to continue to collaborate and to be more data-driven to become more efficient with scarce resources. As an example, Bliss described how the bad economy and funding cuts have forced stakeholders in Providence to think and work smarter:

Another thing that came out was a greater realization that we can't do everything, so we look at what interventions will yield the greatest impact. For example, early childhood learning yields impact for a lifetime; not doing it results in needs that last a lifetime. If you have a little money and are looking to make an impact that yields benefits beyond your immediate program, another place [to invest] is financial empowerment, so families make the most of their resources and spend wisely.

Some respondents also noted the mobility of the population and changing demographics as key factors challenging their community change capacities and their ability to achieve desired population- or community-level outcomes. In some instances, the families who have made advances (including resident leaders) have moved out of the community. Moreover, the families moving in to replace them may not only have multiple needs but may also require providers to develop additional capacities to meet those needs (if, for instance, there is a large influx of non-English speakers). In other cases, the neighborhoods have begun to gentrify as a result of the revitalization efforts that have occurred and, although the neighborhood itself may be improving, it becomes increasingly difficult to ensure that the community's long-term residents can benefit from the improvements and are not displaced.²⁴

According to the local stakeholders, another factor that negatively impacted efforts to achieve population-level outcomes was the recession.

SUSTAINING CAPACITY IMPROVEMENTS

As suggested by the preceding section, the communities' abilities to sustain the change capacities that were built over the decade of Making Connections are not a foregone conclusion. To explore this issue, we asked the local stakeholders to comment on the likely sustainability of the various capacities that were established or enhanced. Their responses suggest that the capacities can be seen as falling into three categories, each of which has a different prognosis for sustainability.

— 1 —

CAPACITIES THAT HAVE ACHIEVED A DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION: Respondents in most of the sites feel that at least some of the core change capacities have become ingrained in their community's DNA, such as the use of the Results-Based Accountability framework and the commitment to collaborative approaches. The interviewees assert that many individuals and organizations have been exposed to these capacities and approaches and that these improved practices have become part of the way of doing business in the community. Therefore, from the respondents' perspectives, these capacities do not need dedicated funding to be maintained.

— 2 —

CAPACITIES AND APPROACHES THAT REQUIRE ONGOING SUPPORT: A second category of capacities involve

those seen as still requiring an institutional home and/or earmarked funding to be sustained or to grow. For example, respondents indicated that a focus on place-based approaches was only likely to be sustained if there is funding specifically for those efforts. In addition, although respondents report the commitment to resident engagement has generally increased across the communities, some interviewees indicated that dedicated funding and champions in influential institutions are essential to ensure that resident empowerment efforts continue to be supported and residents continue to receive leadership training.²⁵

Relative to the need for continuing attention to leadership development, San Antonio's Muñoz defined the issue of leadership more broadly:

As far as leadership goes, we must leave a legacy of leadership where we cultivate leadership over time — that is, succession planning. We have strong leaders now, but we need to cultivate the next group of leaders in order to sustain it and build it. San Antonio has the ability to do that, but it is not quite there yet. There's not enough [effort] around putting young people through scenarios and giving them the experience to be great leaders....I think that [this is an issue] across the country, not just San Antonio.

In several of the communities, United Way, LISC and some other local funders and intermediaries have assumed the role of continuing champions for various strategies and capacities to which the communities were first exposed during Making Connections. In other cases, funding from new national initiatives (Promise Neighbor-



hoods, Choice Neighborhoods, Social Innovation Fund, etc.) is emphasizing similar capacities and/or strategies (such as place-based approaches) and helping to reinforce the lessons from the Making Connections period.

The interviewees also suggest that there is now greater recognition among many local stakeholders that one funder cannot do it all and that communities need to align and braid funding from a variety of sources. What is less clear is how widespread and deep the level of local funder commitment is to support these capacities on an ongoing basis or to collaboratively invest in initiatives. Funders often prefer to fund direct services rather than invest in capacity building (even if such capacity building is essential to ensuring effective service delivery). Many funders also want to have their own distinct initiatives, rather than providing ongoing support for an initiative started by others. Change in the behavior of the local funder community (or the lack of change) will be a major determinant of whether the capacities in this second category are maintained or enhanced over the long term.

— 3 —

CAPACITIES THAT WILL CONTINUE TO SOME EXTENT UNAIDED BUT NONE-THELESS SHOULD BE STRENGTHENED: Other capacities, such as the strategic use of data, fall into a middle ground between those capacities that are institutionalized and those that require ongoing support. Respondents indicated that their communities now embrace the idea of managing by data, and local organizations view the use of data

as indispensable to running their programs and local initiatives. However, as suggested by information presented earlier in this paper, many of the local organizations also are still learning how to move beyond merely tracking activities and outcomes to a point where they can use data strategically to promote continuous improvement. The resources for such data-related activities are limited, and the organizations are faced with tough choices relative to deciding which data functions to prioritize and to what level of data capacity they should aspire. In this environment, the funder community can play an invaluable role in building local data capacity in two ways: first, by developing common performance measures for grantees across funders to reduce inefficiencies in organizations' data collection and reporting activities and, second, by providing funding to support data-driven reflective learning by community organizations, individually and collectively.

Although respondents say the commitment to resident engagement has generally increased across the communities, some indicated that dedicated funding and champions in influential institutions are essential to ensure that resident empowerment efforts continue to be supported and that residents continue to receive leadership training.

THOUGHTS ON DO-OVERS

The local stakeholders were asked to look back on the capacity-building and community change experiences of Making Connections and other local initiatives over the past decade and to identify things they would want to see done differently if they were to redo the experience, or as part of a new initiative. In response to this question, the 19 interviewees offered a varied set of observations and recommendations. One recommendation (regarding setting clear and realistic initiative goals early) was mentioned by five interviewees, but the rest were cited by no more than two or three respondents apiece. However, overall the respondents' comments tended to cluster around particular topics, as presented below.

Establishing Initiative Goals and Process

Five interviewees recommended that more work be done early on to specify concrete change goals and a narrower (and therefore perhaps more realistic) focus. Respondents also recommended concentrating on achieving early wins. Regarding the initial lack of clarity of Making Connections' goals and expectations, for instance, Gatz of Louisville stated:

The beginning was kind of chaotic. In the early stages, there were a lot of competing visions about what Making Connections itself was supposed to be, and [what it was supposed to] focus on covered a vast

amount of territory....If we had moved through those initial stages more rapidly, we could've gotten to impact faster....It took a while to have a clear focus. I would try to get a clear focus for the initiative more rapidly....Pick your shots better in the design of a new initiative.

Similarly, Bliss of Providence observed, "[I would] also urge [Casey] to come up with concrete goals a lot sooner. The unproductive start [of Making Connections] led to meat being put on the bones in 2007-2008 — a little late."²⁶

Regarding the value of quick wins, McGuigan of Providence offered:

I'm a huge believer in early victories. I might have picked different issues or campaigns where we have more chance to show results in the short term — early, visible victories. Making Connections

was a place-based effort; in Providence, the work was around people, and people are mobile. It [i.e., the focus of Making Connections] should have been more of a mix, so the improvements are visible. "Increasing academic achievement" can't be seen.

Interviewees acknowledged that establishing a narrower set of goals earlier also would have required having the tough conversations sooner (to assess existing capacities and gaps more critically and to select priorities for attention). But respondents felt this too would have been helpful. As Muñoz of San Antonio reflected:

I would pressure us to do more sooner and to have the tough conversations sooner. We didn't want to defund any organization because of our desire to build capacity. But sometimes results weren't be-





ing achieved. Unfortunately, we did not react quickly enough when results were needed. In our current work of Promise Neighborhoods, we have the understanding that reaction time is critical and tough conversations are unavoidable; children and families' lives are at stake.

Respondents also recommended more collaboration with preexisting efforts to develop the change agenda. They felt it was important to manage the planning process in a way that would avoid "getting too far in front of everyone." Respondents saw the approach of building on existing efforts and confirming stakeholder buy-in as one way to promote sustainability. Bliss noted:

Not that Casey did this, but don't approach this as if you're starting from scratch with a blank piece of paper. Build and braid on what's in place. Involve and recruit other funders up front, with Casey leading by example. [Frame it as:] "This is not Casey's initiative but something Casey wants to do with others." [Not doing that] was a barrier to involvement by others. People said they would show up, but there's only so much heart they're willing to put into it [if their views and previous efforts are not being acknowledged].

Dana Jackson Thompson of Louisville also emphasized the importance of allowing divergent viewpoints to be considered and of responding to changes in community activities and opinions over time:

Probably at the onset, [I would recommend] to really be in more conversation with locals around the actual agenda and to create space for those interests to play out as well if they are divergent from the Foundation's core [agenda]...I don't know the answer to this, but there is work to do around resource development for sustainability — that is big! And there's something [important to] me around taking the temperature over time, multiple times, around what's happening in the community that can be contributed to the work.

Although interviewees felt it was essential to engage stakeholders, including residents, in conversations to achieve explicit consensus around a common vision, they also indicated that it is important to avoid being too process-oriented, and to focus more on actions. This is obviously a challenging balancing act.

Stakeholder feedback also indicated change efforts should avoid having

too many spokespeople from the funders and/or external consultants involved in the process. Too many voices were seen as resulting in mixed messages or pulling the local initiative in too many directions.

Leadership and Resident Engagement

Interviewees noted that it would have been valuable to have a clear institutional home for the effort earlier, to get the right local leadership in place in the beginning of the initiative and to do more to try to maintain the consistency of that leadership over time. Hard of San Antonio observed: “The thing we learned from Casey is that finding institutional leaders and institutional homes is one of the key areas that needs to be done...not necessarily first off, but earlier into the process.”

Fugenschuh of Des Moines also commented on the value of having more consistent leadership and direction:

There were three [local] Making Connections coordinators [over the course of the initiative], with different leadership styles. They didn't have consistency. At the local level and at the Casey level, there was a change in staff and what their agenda was. I know it was evolving, but being clear and consistent with the agenda would've made it easier to carry out the work. Knowing the type of leader it takes — this is unique work. When you're hiring, be really clear and share what kind of leader it takes to do this work. Make it consistent throughout, so you have the same leadership at Casey and the local level.

As part of that process, several respondents also stressed the importance of

engaging residents and building their leadership skills early in the life of an initiative, rather than later, so that the resident leadership development doesn't appear as an afterthought.

Funding and Sustainability

In discussing Making Connections, a number of interviewees concluded that there should have been a requirement for more diverse funding up front. Some interviewees also noted that during the initiative, Casey assumed virtually all costs relating to certain functions (e.g., use of data, resident engagement, facilitators for stakeholder tables). In hindsight, the interviewees felt it would have been better if Casey had required a match to get the local communities in the habit of paying for these functions so they would be prepared to maintain them after the Foundation's funding ended.

On a related topic, stakeholders also emphasized the importance of having more effective communication and planning for the transition that will occur when the major external funding for an initiative is expected to wind down. A particular focus for a number of interviewees was the role of residents in those discussions and in the ongoing initiative management after transition. Castilla of San Antonio observed:

Resident involvement should be a necessary component in turning [the initiative] over to the local management entity, and the residents should be involved because if [the local management entity is] not connected to our issues, then the programs will not reflect our needs. The residents won't listen to [the local management entity] either.

On the topic of resident involvement in transition planning, Ryan commented:

[Making Connections in Indianapolis] started to fall apart at the end. I don't know how much we as residents had control over that; it was lost to some of us [by that point]. It seemed like an administrative issue. When it went to other institutions [to serve as the local management entity for the initiative], they decided what they wanted to do with the money. Maybe as residents we could've had more push to that and identified pieces that were working and didn't want to go away. We were under the assumption that [the initiative] would continue under the other groups, but it didn't, and we were too late to do anything about it.

Stakeholders also expressed the view that, if the goal for an initiative is community transformation and population-level outcomes, funders should be prepared to commit funding for longer time periods — and to recognize that even 10 years of funding may not be enough. Watt of White Center explained:

Also, at the outset [of an initiative], say 20 years instead of 10. As remarkable as that list of changes was [i.e., the outcomes Watt described earlier in the interview], if we had that level of resources and support from Casey — the trainings, convenings, consultants, etc. — and all of it contributed and was important — if we'd gone on another 10 years, that would've been better. The other question we want to ask is, can you do this kind of work without gentrifying? Could it be a mixed [income] place? We could only know that if we kept it up for 20 years, not 10. But 20-year initiatives scare people. Too many foundations and philanthropists get bored af-

ter three years and go on to do different things. A lot of the changes they hoped for either didn't happen or didn't stick. You can't get life change in short cycles. Communities don't get so vulnerable overnight and don't get out [of those conditions] overnight. The fact that [Casey] had the guts to do [this initiative for] 10 years was superb.

Data Capacity

In building data capacity during Making Connections, interviewees felt there should have been more attention to tracking locally defined performance measures, rather than all the attention devoted to Casey-defined metrics. Some of the Casey-defined metrics were not as relevant to local stakeholders but became the data focus because Casey was paying all the data capacity costs. Broder of Denver discussed this issue:

[One needs to decide] the balance between what [are] local data needs and program data needs and the turnaround time for input...We were reporting but not reflecting [on the findings from the data] to guide our work locally. We should have looked at what the [data] needs are for the local community. I think that if we had taken the time to reflect...in the middle of the project or after a milestone, we would have adjusted the work to better meet the local needs. This was a great learning experience for us and has shaped our evaluation work going forward.

Encouraging Risk-Taking and Experimentation

Several interviewees also commented on the importance of funders acting in a manner consistent with their

values. Gatz of Louisville reflected on this issue in the context of risk-taking and experimentation:

There's an interesting paradox that played out in Making Connections related to risk-taking and experimentation: The Casey Foundation stressed those values, but there was also always a strong sense that, as a site, you had to always be ready to prove your worth and be "on show" and be a site that's featured at a meeting or else there must be something wrong — all of those things mitigate against taking risks and failing...

And the fact that [some of the original] sites were dropped from the initiative... I don't think it was wrong that those sites were dropped, but I'm saying there was an unintended consequence in that it undermined the sense that there was latitude to experiment and take risks. In work that is attempting to address long-standing societal problems, you have to try new approaches with no guarantee of success, and most impact doesn't emerge in the short term — you often can't show immediate results to prove the effectiveness of what you're doing.

This internal contradiction hampered or dampened the sense that risk-taking and experimentation were valued and supported. You can't have risk-taking without failure, and there was not a lot of tolerance for failure.

"In work that is attempting to address long-standing societal problems, you have to try new approaches with no guarantee of success, and most impact doesn't emerge in the short term — you often can't show immediate results to prove the effectiveness of what you're doing."

CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

This paper has examined, from the perspective of local stakeholders, the experience over the past decade of a group of seven communities — all former Making Connections sites — in building their local capacities to pursue their change agendas. Respondents from each of the communities included in this study reported improvements in a range of core capacities essential to their change efforts. The stakeholders offered considerable credit to Casey for helping them to develop or enhance their communities' change capacities. Casey did this through providing flexible financial assistance, leadership development support, technical assistance on best practices, Results-Based Accountability training, peer networking and modeling improved practices.

The local stakeholders in the seven communities described a variety of examples of improved outcomes for children, families and neighborhoods that they attribute to these capacity improvements, although none of the communities have yet seen population-level changes. Moreover, despite the substantial progress reported relative to the change capacities, respondents acknowledged variation in the extent to which the key capacities have been institutionalized in their communities.

The experience and reflections of the local stakeholders in these communities have yielded an array of lessons about how future efforts might be more

effective in building and sustaining capacity and in achieving outcomes for families and neighborhoods at greater scale. Although it is difficult to single out a few key lessons regarding scale, sustainability and impact from our review of local stakeholders' experiences and perspectives, some of the more crucial lessons for funders and practitioners include recognizing the importance of:

- ♦ creating mechanisms for ongoing resident participation in planning and executing change efforts;
- ♦ engaging residents and developing skilled resident leadership as drivers of accountability;
- ♦ building the essential change capacities across networks of organizations and stakeholders within a community, rather than allowing them to remain isolated within a few organizations;
- ♦ establishing structures that promote collective accountability and emergent learning;
- ♦ addressing the difficulties that communities experience in having the hard conversations needed to identify and address dysfunctional systems and practices (and to foster collective accountability);
- ♦ enhancing local stakeholders' capacity to take efforts to scale not only through replication but also through policy and system change;
- ♦ identifying mechanisms to sustain capacity enhancements up front as part of the process of developing those capacities, rather than waiting until the dedicated funding is winding down; and
- ♦ securing the buy-in of local funders as the most logical sources of continuing incentives and reinforcement for providers to maintain improved



practices and to further enhance their capacities.

The last point arguably may be the most important. To a substantial degree, a continuing place-based orientation, maintenance of enhanced capacities and/or commitment to continuous improvement and adoption of better practices will remain the focus of practitioners in a community only if funders (local and otherwise) continue to emphasize them as part of the normal way of doing business. Such practices have to be an integral part of the providers' incentive system, rather than simply something that is the right thing to do. Funders will set the tone, and if they don't provide continuing reinforcement, many practitioners and other local stakeholders will simply slip back into old patterns of behavior.

In addition to the local stakeholders' perspectives, in several places in this report, we have noted the lessons that Casey itself has derived from the Making Connections experience, which the Foundation summarized in its 2013 *Community Change: Lessons From Making Connections* report. There is considerable alignment between the lessons learned regarding effective approaches to community change and family strengthening highlighted in Casey's report and the local stakeholders' do-overs and key takeaways. One consistent theme is the importance of resident engagement and leadership development. Other themes that both Casey and the local stakeholders emphasize include:

- ♦ specifying clear and realistic goals, success measures and timelines for the change efforts early on;

- ♦ being prepared to provide sustained and sufficient investment, given the goals and timelines that have been established;
- ♦ emphasizing a two-generation approach in working with families (which the local stakeholders tended to characterize as dealing with families in a holistic manner);
- ♦ paying attention to the specific challenges and assets in each community and customizing strategies and practices accordingly;
- ♦ understanding the complexity of managing and measuring community change and, relative to the latter, the importance of developing effective ways of harnessing and learning from data; and
- ♦ addressing resident mobility to reduce the adverse effects of such mobility and to more comprehensively assess the benefits generated by an initiative.

Given the divergence that all too frequently occurs between a funder's and local implementer's retrospective assessment of an initiative, the alignment in many of the key takeaways in this case is both striking and encouraging. It also suggests that these are important lessons for the field to note — and for funders and practitioners to carefully consider when designing and implementing new place-based initiatives.

Given the divergence that all too frequently occurs between a funder's and local implementer's retrospective assessment of an initiative, the alignment in many of the key takeaways in this case is both striking and encouraging.

¹ The 10 Making Connections communities were Denver, Des Moines, Hartford, Indianapolis, Louisville, Milwaukee, Oakland, Providence, San Antonio and Seattle (White Center).

² Research had shown Casey that at-risk families are not scattered randomly. As described in an early Making Connections publication: “The worst outcomes for children can be tracked to a relatively small number of neighborhoods, with many of the same characteristics — few job opportunities, few or no services, lack of vital sources of support, and scant acknowledgment of the need to help families identify their needs and strengths and fashion solutions themselves.” See Casey’s *Local Learning Partnership Guidebook*, 2002, p. 9.

³ Although Casey never formulated a rigid definition of scale for the Making Connections sites, the Foundation hoped that, over time, the initiative’s activities would foster improvements in the practices and capacities of a sufficient number of local practitioners, and touch a sufficient number of residents, so that the communities would begin to make progress toward moving the needle in terms of population- and neighborhood-level outcomes.

⁴ For example, see Chavis, D. (2011). *Emerging action principles for designing and planning community change*. Gaithersburg, MD: Community Science; Trent, T., & Chavis, D. Scope, scale, and sustainability: What it takes to create lasting community change. *Foundation Review*, 1(1), 96-114; Kubisch, A., Auspos, P., Brown, P., & Dewar, T. (2010). *Voices from the field III: lessons and challenges from two decades of community change efforts*, Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute.

Although the literature identifies some additional crucial capacities not reflected in Casey’s list — such as links to the regional economy and paying explicit attention to race, culture and the history of change efforts in the community — Casey’s six core capacities are common to the key factors identified in these other studies.

⁵ The December 2012 reconnaissance interviews were conducted with the following individuals:

- Denver: Susan Motika, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (former Making Connections site coordinator for Denver)
- Des Moines: Chuck Palmer, Iowa Department of Human Services (formerly of ISED Ventures), and Becky Miles-Polka, Within Reach Consulting Services LLC (formerly at Iowa Health System)
- Hartford: Jim Horan, Connecticut Association of Human Services
- Providence: Tanja Kubas-Meyer, social policy and evaluation consultant
- Seattle/White Center: Theresa Fujiwara, United Way of Seattle (former Making Connections site coordinator)

These individuals were not only helpful in identifying promising topics to address in our study but also in suggesting the names of local respondents who could offer useful perspectives and in recommending refinements to our interview protocol to encourage thoughtful and candid responses from interviewees.

⁶ None of these individuals were among the local site representatives contacted for our study’s earlier reconnaissance discussions.

⁷ The implementation of Making Connections began in 2000 with planning and community engagement activities in 22 cities. In 2002, Casey chose 10 sites that would fully implement Making Connections. By 2008, the number of full-fledged, comprehensive sites had been reduced to seven. The communities included in our study were the seven comprehensive sites as of 2008. For more details on the evolution of the initiative, see: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013). *Community change: Lessons from Making Connections*. Baltimore, MD: Author.

⁸ Throughout the remainder of this report, when we mention “the communities,” we are referring to those seven Making Connections sites.

⁹ As noted in endnote no. 6, Casey published a 2013 report, *Community Change: Lessons From Making Connections*, which represents a distillation of lessons learned from the initiative. That report was largely derived from information contained in previous Making Connections publications from Casey and represents the Foundation’s perspective on the key insights and takeaways from the initiative. In contrast, this paper presents what local stakeholders believe to be key lessons on community change and related capacities during the decade in which Making Connections was underway. At the end of this paper, we will compare and contrast these two sets of lessons.

¹⁰ One of the striking features of the interview responses to this line of questioning was the frequency with which individuals, without any prompting, used the term “silo” to describe the characteristics of the local change efforts in their communities prior to Making Connections.

ENDNOTES

¹¹ In describing the period prior to the launch of Making Connections, 15 of the 19 interviewees across the seven sites cited the limited capacity of their communities to articulate and pursue a community change agenda as well as the lack of collaboration or coordination among local actors — or both.

¹² When asked about their community's willingness to have hard conversations and learn from mistakes to promote continuous improvement, only eight of the 17 interviewees who responded to the question answered affirmatively. Nine respondents replied by either indicating that those conversations were not happening or that the stakeholders were finding it very difficult to have those discussions.

¹³ Although a few respondents conceded that there was still room for growth, 15 of the 16 respondents who answered the interview question about data capacity reported that such capacity had increased in their community. A single respondent indicated that he believed his community's data capacity had not improved over the previous decade; he saw the importance of data capacity as a concept that had been introduced to the community but without sufficient follow-up.

¹⁴ Results-Based Accountability™ (RBA) is a disciplined way for community stakeholders to think about problems, strategize and take action to improve the lives of children, families and the community as a whole. RBA is a framework based on concepts and materials developed by Mark Friedman, author of *Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough* (Trafford 2005). See also the Results Leadership Group's *The Results-Based Accountability™ Guide* (2010).

¹⁵ Seventeen respondents answered the interview question regarding collective accountability. In addition to the 14 responses reported above, one respondent indicated that, in his opinion, his community had not increased its commitment to collective accountability, and two individuals answered the question by saying, "I don't know."

¹⁶ Those 13 interviewees represent at least one respondent from each site.

¹⁷ Although several interviewees mentioned "the city" in describing their community's institutional homes for change, one respondent indicated that she did not believe local or metro government was an appropriate home for a community change agenda.

¹⁸ Sixteen respondents answered the interview question regarding enhanced community capacity to move change efforts to larger scale. Among these respondents, 12 replied affirmatively, indicating that their community was currently taking its change efforts to scale. These 12 respondents included representatives from six sites (Denver was the exception). The other four respondents (including one from Denver) indicated their community was taking on the issue of scale but had not yet fully developed its capacity in this area.

¹⁹ As suggested by this example, we saw some substantial differences among the respondents in how they framed community when discussing local capacity. Resident activists, for example, were more likely to define community as the residents in their neighborhoods. The representatives of nonprofits, on the other hand, often focused on government and the local network of nonprofits when discussing community capacity.

This raises an interesting issue about the intended local "container" for the community capacity that Casey was trying to build. Casey envisioned building change capacities on a community-wide basis in the Making Connections sites. But with some exceptions (such as the RBA training), much of Casey's capacity-building efforts in the communities tended to focus on the close-in partners and resident leaders engaged in the local Making Connections activities. However, as noted in this paper, as these practitioners and community activists subsequently moved on to other initiatives, they took the skills, knowledge and perspectives acquired from the Making Connections experience with them.

²⁰ Sixteen respondents answered the interview question on leveraging, with 10 of them indicating their community's capacity had increased and four others indicating such capacity had increased somewhat, but it was still a developmental process.

²¹ We need to acknowledge that the Making Connections activities placed considerable emphasis on race, class and culture, with substantial assistance from the Casey Foundation in helping the sites address these issues. The absence of more frequent commentary by the informants on these issues, therefore, may have been the result of the limitations of our interview protocol rather than being a reflection of the importance they assigned to them.

²² Sixteen of the 18 respondents answering the question asking them to identify the key factors that promoted the capacity improvements made reference to the influence of Casey and Making Connections.

²³ For a discussion on the alignment of funder expectations for community change versus the realities of the time frames for the process, see: Brown, P., Chaskin, R.J., Hamilton, R., & Richman, H. (2003). *Toward greater effectiveness in community change: Challenges and responses for philanthropy.*

New York, N.Y.: The Foundation Center; also see, Kubisch, A., et al. (2010). *Voices from the field III: Lessons and challenges from two decades of community change efforts.* Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute.

²⁴ One of the Casey Foundation's key take-aways from Making Connections is the importance of addressing resident mobility in place-based efforts. Like the local stakeholders cited in this paper, Casey concluded that resident mobility was one of a number of factors — including a lack of sustained and sufficient investments and interventions — that contributed to the failure of the initiative to achieve population-level outcomes and close the gap in the Making Connections communities. In addition, in response to the experience of Making Connections and of other comprehensive community change efforts over the past decade, Casey has noted the need to do a better job at defining success for place-based community change — i.e., setting metrics for success that are more realistic about the pace of change and that also measure the benefit received by residents who move from the target community during the course of an initiative. (See the Casey Foundation's *Community Change: Lessons From Making Connections*, pp. 16-18.)

²⁵ However, it is also worth noting that some of the residents who were trained during Making Connections and interviewed for our study reported that they feel empowered to continue to identify and pursue a neighborhood change agenda, regardless of whether they receive ongoing explicit support from nonprofit or government entities. Therefore, although the ideal would be to have a continuing institutional home for training residents, Making Connections' investment in training particular resident leaders does appear to be having a continued impact in some communities.

²⁶ In fact, Casey began articulating and communicating desired core outcomes for the sites in 2001-2002. However, the Foundation refined its results metrics over time and did not specify success measures for the sites' workforce development and focused school efforts until 2007-2008, late in the term of the initiative. As shown by these comments, Casey's process of refining key outcome measures left some local stakeholders feeling that the Foundation had shifted the focus of Making Connections over the life of the initiative and led them to conclude that Casey had needed to be clearer and more specific about its goals from the outset.



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438 N. Frederick Avenue, Suite 315
Gaithersburg, MD 20877
301.519.0722
www.communityscience.com



THE ANNIE E. CASEY
FOUNDATION

701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
410.547.6600
www.aecf.org