

Comprehensive Community Initiatives

This document provides summary information, including the scope of the project, the goals, theory of change and lessons learned from each of the following:

Rebuilding Communities Initiative – Annie E. Casey

New Futures - Annie E. Casey

Neighborhood Improvement Initiative – Hewlett Foundation

Urban Health Initiative – Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Community Building in Partnership – Enterprise Foundation

Comprehensive Community Revitalization Program – Surdna

Neighborhood & Family Initiative – Ford Foundation

Voices from the Field – Aspen Institute

Rebuilding Communities Initiatives

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Rebuilding Communities: A Neighborhood Reinvestment Strategy, Framework Paper (1993)

Learning from the Journey: Reflections on the Rebuilding Communities Initiative (undated)

Scope: Seven year initiative designed to provide the supports needed to help transform troubled, economically disenfranchised neighborhoods into safe, supportive, and productive environments for children, youth, and their families. The Foundation works in partnership with community-based organizations on comprehensive strategies to reverse social isolation and disinvestment in low-income neighborhoods.

Goals: articulated as “critical areas of change”

- Maximize the capacity and impact of neighborhood resources and institutions
- Establish effective neighborhood-based human service delivery systems for children, youth and families
- Develop capable and effective neighborhood collaboratives to which governance authority could be devolved
- Improve availability of affordable housing and the social and physical infrastructure of neighborhoods
- Increase public and private capital investments in neighborhoods
- Build resident power

Theory of Change: A comprehensive rebuilding effort to revitalize distressed neighborhoods that employed the strategies of reinvestment in social and economic infrastructure, and political self-determination through collaborative neighborhood governance, would contribute to the sustainable development of neighborhoods and improved life experiences for children and families.

Lessons Learned:

- Resident empowerment must be at the core of community rebuilding efforts
- The need for capacity building is critical and continual
- Acting as lead agency requires balancing competing roles and interests
- It takes a long time and a lot of time every day, to rebuild communities
- Partnership building is extremely difficult work
- Power dynamics between funders and grantees can be greatly lessened, but never completely eliminated

New Futures

Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Path of Most Resistance: Reflections on Lessons Learned from New Futures (1995)

The Eye of the Storm: Ten Years on the Front Lines of New Futures (undated)

Scope: The first of the Foundation's long-term, multi-site initiatives aimed at reforming public policies and improving the effectiveness of major institutions serving children. Ten cities received \$20,000 grants to subsidize a six-month planning process. Each city was asked to form a broadly based planning committee that would prepare a proposal for the Foundation. The cities were asked to create collaborative decision-making bodies that represented a broad cross-section of local leadership. These collaboratives were to use pooled and deregulated resources as a way of increasing the discretion, flexibility and responsiveness of institutions, teachers and frontline staff. The cities were also asked to create a database of outcomes in order to provide an incentive for and a measure of the local commitment to continuous improvement and reform over the life of the initiative.

Goals:

- Improved school achievement, a decrease in the drop-out rate, and a corresponding increase in the graduation rate
- A reduction in the incidence of adolescent pregnancy and parenthood
- A lessening of youth unemployment and inactivity after high school

Theory: Existing service and support systems were inefficient in meeting their goals for poor children and poor families, especially those in low-income urban areas; these failures were due in part to deficiencies in the transactions between helping institutions/professionals and the children and families allegedly being helped; drawing upon research, exemplary programs and common sense, the Foundation believed more effective services could be provided; current practices could not be changed to more effective ones unless the systems that determine such practices were changed first

Lessons Learned:

- Comprehensive reforms are very difficult – *the path of most resistance*;
 - parts of the reform agenda threatened stability of current system and others discounted good aspects of the system that existed;
 - several sites realized the difficulty of running programs and simultaneously pursuing system change; the impulse to provide direct services was difficult to resist and interfered with reform-oriented work
 - good communication demands clarity of purpose, design, and expectations
 - Power, race and ethnicity matter and broadly representative groups will always need significant time to work together
- It takes time...
 - To build constituencies that are politically committed to long-term success
 - To conduct detailed assessments of current conditions and current state of services and resources
 - To allow for careful and detailed planning of strategically sequenced change

- To build the management capacities necessary to sustain the effort over time and through changes in leadership
- It's not for every community
 - The need for core leadership to articulate the initiative, build consensus, manage change, weather the storms, and continually refine the effort without losing community support is great
 - Management challenges are inherent in the kind of complex change processes required to have a significant impact on youth
 - Need a conviction that the existing systems are badly flawed and require fundamental change
 - Credibility and legitimacy of the lead agency to speak with authority and candor and to be a respected source of information is vital
- Building local ownership is no simple matter
 - Need clear roles, frank and respectful communications and well-defined partnerships with clear goals, strategies, processes and outcomes
 - Local ownership cannot be replaced successfully by any amount of Foundation staff or technical assistance
- Refine and modify plans
 - Crucially examine short and long term goals, the membership of the collaborative bodies and the allocation of funds
- Communicate
 - This initiative suffered from accolades given too early followed by criticism and disappointment that were also premature
 - Often overlooked was the constituency building and political process that was the core of the work
 - Be articulate about the interim benchmarks that were really important; gives participants and stakeholders clearer "road signs."
 - Well-developed communication strategy and establishing interim measures of progress are important
- Real change often depends on increases in economic opportunity and social capital
 - Have to find ways to increase employment and other opportunities for families and youth – can't just be about child outcomes
 - Explore unique opportunities to create jobs within communities

Neighborhood Improvement Initiative
William & Flora Hewlett Foundation
Hard Lessons about Philanthropy & Community Change from the Neighborhood Improvement Initiative (2007)

Scope: From 1996 – 2006, the Hewlett Foundation committed over \$20 million to a Neighborhood Improvement Initiative designed to improve the lives of residents in three Bay Area communities – West Oakland, East Palo Alto, and the Mayfair area of East San Jose. The foundation used three community foundations as “managing partners” and created new organizations as well as involving existing ones in the neighborhoods. The goal was to achieve tangible improvements for residents and to strengthen the long-term capacity of the community foundations and neighborhood organizations to sustain change.

Goals:

- Connect fragmented efforts to address poverty-related issues in select communities
- Improve the capacity for participating community-based organizations
- Improve Bay Area community foundations’ capacity to support neighborhood improvement
- Develop neighborhood leaders by creating a vehicle for increasing resident involvement in neighborhood planning and improvement strategies
- Leverage significant public/private resource to support community improvement
- Provide long-term statistical evidence of changes in poverty indicators

Theory of Change: Hewlett did not develop a detailed theory of change that specified all the connections between each goal, the strategies to achieve the goal and the underlying assumptions. Like other initiatives of the day, NII “*theories were articulated as the work unfolded rather than in advance.*” The overall theory was that “improvement in the physical, social, and economic conditions in lower-income neighborhoods will result from the active involvement of residents in community planning and decision making processes, in combination with a comprehensive coordinated, multi-year strategy to address the problems that impair the quality of life in these neighborhoods.”

Lessons Learned:

- A long time frame is needed for change
 - A year for planning was not sufficient – none of the sites were ready to begin when the planning period ended
 - If the initiative is struggling too hard, for too long, and on too many levels it may be time to end the initiative, change grantees, or adjust the amount of funding
- Need an adequate amount of money, disbursed strategically
 - While the amount of money available for the initiative was generous, how the money was used was of more importance to the outcomes
 - Leading with money distorts expectations
 - It’s possible to overwhelm a site with resources before they are ready to use them

- Resident involvement brings the community's preexisting power dynamics to the surface
 - Big money is often necessary to get big results but it comes with tradeoffs
 - Foundations' grant cycles are not aligned with the pace of neighborhood change
 - Leveraged funds can come at a cost
- Don't underestimate the amount of human effort, knowledge and commitment it will take
 - Community change work is labor intensive both in the number of people needed and the effort required of each
 - Evaluators need clarity about purpose of the evaluation, understanding of the underlying theory and strategies, a focus on learning, ability to demystify evaluation, ability to help people learn in real time, understand what participants already know and what they want to learn, what they might need to know, and a commitment to feedback loops
 - Foundation staff need clarity about the theory of change, inclination to partner with grantees, prior experience with front line community change, understand the power dynamics in a community
 - Staff of the partner organization need to understand evaluation and outcomes, have a strategic approach to grant making, how to work with government agencies, ability to work in a highly political environment, the complexity of community change, ability to facilitate TA, see big picture while managing details
 - Need support of top level foundation leaders
 - Foundation donors can be an important resource
 - Foundation institutional assets can be used for community change
 - Get deeply involved in the community
 - The effort of working comprehensively can build powerful allies that cut across professional and cultural boundaries
 - Recognize technical assistance needs
 - Don't let TA get ahead of itself – too much too soon can be overwhelming and ineffective
 - Difficult to bring disparate pieces together without a strong strategic framework
- Community change work and foundations – it only works IF:
 - The foundation has the ability to establish productive relationships with the diverse people and organizations that they'll need to work with to achieve change
 - The ability to take a learning stance through the entire initiative – participants describe the NII as never having established the necessary trust for candid learning
 - Learning can be undermined by a culture of anxiety, blame, and unresolved power dynamics
- Individual hopes of learning came up hard against the a culture of anxiety and blame for failure to achieve results

- Hewlett did not evaluate their own role in the implementation process and this was viewed as the foundation not wanting scrutiny or feedback
- Attempts to establish cross-site learning never really took hold
- NII missed the opportunity to fully understand and react to the racial and ethnic tensions that existed in the neighborhoods
- Observations about evaluating and learning from community change:
 - Establish an evaluation framework at the beginning
 - Establish a shared agenda for learning about community change
 - Draw upon the expertise of an external advisory committee for evaluation and learning
 - Don't start implementation without a shared definition of success and how it will be measured
 - Measure and track a full range of outcomes, including changes in capacity and behavior; don't just categorize results as either process or products; don't reject "soft" outcomes
 - Recognize that grantees may not enter the initiative with capacity to produce outcomes or track progress toward them
 - Position evaluation as a tool for improving practices and nurturing the change process as well as for gauging outcomes
 - Consider a phased approach to evaluation; link it to phases in the initiative's own evolution and the iterative process of learning while doing
 - Tap residents knowledge while also sharing good ideas gleaned from other initiatives
 - Ensure that foundation staff and grantees understand the requirements and limitations of evaluation
 - Be realistic about what can be done to capture effects given the nature of community change and the available time and resources
 - Model the learning process at all levels and hold everyone to the same standards for clarity on outcomes
 - Promote learning across sites and among partners
 - Cultivate a flexible learning stance; be comfortable with the formative nature of the work
 - Put mechanisms in place to explicitly support learning (such as on the agenda and in the schedule)

The Urban Health Initiative

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Experience of an Intermediary in a Complex Initiative: The Urban Health Initiative's National Program Office (2005)

Finding the Impact in a Messy Intervention: Using an Integrated Design to Evaluate a Comprehensive Citywide Health Initiative (2009)

Scope: In 1995, RWJF launched the UHI; it had 6 features:

- Focused on large, distressed cities with deeply entrenched problems
- An emphasis on changing systems, with grant funding intended as venture capital to change public systems to produce better outcomes
- Local choice regarding areas and strategies of focus
- The engagement of strong local leadership in multiple sectors
- A 10 year commitment with funding over \$80 million for site activities, TA, and evaluation
- A goal of measurable change citywide in multiple domains related to health and safety indicators for children and youth

Goals:

- Short-term (planning phase)
 - Increased engagement across multiple sectors
 - Increased engagement among community participants
 - Increased engagement among civic elite
 - Increased use of data and best practice models for defining and addressing problems facing children and youth
- Medium-term (working smarter for kids)
 - Enhanced sense of urgency regarding problems facing city's children
 - Creation of a shared vision for addressing youth problems
 - Emergence of political will to make needed changes
 - Strengthened policies and programs relevant to children and youth through the use of data, best practice and reorientation of funding
 - Reshaped norms and behaviors of young people and their parents
- Long-term (improvements in health and safety outcomes)
 - Improvements in life conditions for children and youth
 - Improvements in a broad array of health and safety outcomes citywide
 - Restored optimism for families

Theory of Change: Embraced a political theory in which a multi-sector, data-driven planning process, engaging both the civic elite and the public at large and emphasizing a close reading of the literature on best practice models, would lead to a shared understanding of the problems facing youth and a common vision regarding the strategies to ameliorate them. RWJF emphasized that UHI did not seek to affect the lives of only low-income people; such an initiative could not “move the needle.” The process of citywide engagement would result in a sense of urgency and the political will to restructure policies and programs, that is, change systems, to better achieve their shared vision. Expenditures would be shifted from costly and ineffectual remedial or

“corrective” approaches to more effective and lower cost “preventive” approaches. By engaging the public at large, norms and behaviors among parents and youth would be reshaped to reinforce and enhance these policy and program improvements. It was believed that well-implemented upstream interventions would improve outcomes for children, citywide and in multiple domains, helping to restore optimism for families.

Lessons Learned:

- The implementation of UHI was fairly consistent with the program’s theory but was slower and less linear than anticipated
- The UHI cities benefited from a convening body whose primary function was not to provide services but to facilitate a coordinated effort to achieve shared goals
- Many of the intended medium-term outcomes were at least partly achieved, including efforts to be more data-driven and to raise public perceptions
- UHI was successful in getting modest improvements in areas of greatest program activity and in areas in which individual sites focused special attention
 - Families had greater access to and satisfaction with after-school and other out-of-school services
 - Positive changes in neighborhoods relative to other distressed cities
- Using administrative data for 11 indicators, UHI cities showed more positive trends on 7 of them and negative results on 4
 - Example: decrease in proportion of births to females younger than 20 years who were already mothers
- The impacts of UHI “fall short” when judged by the ambitious expectations of the designers
 - The impacts are in the range of a few percentage points and no change was found in many areas where improvements were expected
 - Progress was slow and incremental
 - Dramatic gaps remained between the quality of life for children in the UHI cities and for children in more affluent areas
- Lack of comprehensive change was not a result of poor implementation by those working in the sites
 - Political, economic, and institutional constraints made it difficult for UHI to realize a dramatic payoff
 - Politics sometimes stood in the way of achieving the goals and weaknesses in provider organizations made the implementation of EBPs hard to achieve
 - Even successful pilot programs were not readily taken to scale because of the complexity of the policy-making process and dramatic shifts in the economic environment
- No evidence that public funds moved upstream to preventive approaches
 - Efforts to build consensus and political will had to be frequently repeated due to the dynamic political context and turnover among elected officials
 - These efforts were hardest in the area of education

Community Building in Partnership

The Enterprise Foundation

Program Profile: Community Building in Partnership, Inc. (2000)

The Sandtown-Winchester Neighborhood Transformation Initiative: Lessons Learned about Community Building & Implementation (2001)

Scope: Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke and the late James Rouse (co-founder of The Enterprise Foundation) and the residents of Sandtown-Winchester initiated the neighborhood transformation effort in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood in 1990 as a partnership among community residents, city government, and The Enterprise Foundation.

Goals:

- Build a viable, working neighborhood in which residents are empowered to direct and sustain their community's physical, social and economic development
- Direct all public and private support systems to help residents achieve self-sufficiency and maximize their potential
- As a result of the renewal effort, create a quality of life that is desirable and provides for economic self-determination, which fulfill current residents and potentially attract new community members

Theory of Change:

- A Comprehensive Vision – solutions to poverty are interrelated and require a comprehensive approach
- An all-encompassing strategy – sought to change outcomes by addressing social, economic and physical conditions at the same time; required changes to improved service delivery as well as changes to the larger systems
- Partnership – longstanding partnership between mayor, residents, Enterprise Foundation was central for change
- Individual & Community Capacity & Ownership – use activities to engage residents and build local leadership
- Financial & Political Leverage – advocate for public and private financial investment as a way of producing long-term tax savings

Lessons Learned:

- Build on a deep understanding of the neighborhood
 - Enter the community slowly and get to know its history and culture
 - Pay attention to community's diversity
 - Base strategies on neighborhood's specific conditions
 - Build trust by setting short-term achievable goals
- Invest in community capacity early
 - Plan for and invest in community-organizing strategies that connect residents and develop shared agendas
 - Provide operating support, TA, and coaching for promising community institutions and their leaders

- Changes should grow at a pace in keeping with the neighborhood's ability to carry them forward
- Generate belief in and ownership of change
 - Manage stakeholders' expectations so that people can see change is possible and also see concrete evidence that it occurs
- Establish a clear decision-making process early
 - Decide who will control the process, set criteria for action, and determine timelines
 - Be especially mindful of the decision-making process when powerful institutions and disenfranchised communities are working together
- Specify the rules of engagement
 - Set rules for distributing power among partners
 - Understand the conditions under which each partner operates
 - Negotiate agreement on key responsibilities
 - Embed goals and expectations in each partner agency
 - Establish a process for reviewing and modifying the process
- Consider partnership with the public sector
 - Public entity's resources and authority should complement the initiative's agenda
 - The initiative has to manage the public partners productively
- Embed community building in every activity
 - Challenging to manage the pressure to show immediate results while still building the residents' capacity to produce long-term change and the capacity of partner organizations to improve their own knowledge, skills, etc.
- Ground expectations in an explicit strategy
 - Help partners understand each other's limitations
 - Negotiate priorities
 - Clarify all partners' assumptions about how the initiative will produce change
 - Incorporate indicators for assessing progress
 - Realistically reflect the partnership's capacity and resources
- Balance funding against pace and priorities
 - The initiative's vision should drive whose money to seek, when to accept it and how to use it
 - Partners must continually educate funders
 - Build in financial support for capacity building among residents and organizations
- Nurture connections among people, ideas and institutions
 - Coordinate interactions among people, institutions, ideas, and information
 - Share responsibility among stakeholders for making and maintaining connections
 - Effectively communicate with the community
- Build residents' economic self-sufficiency
 - Must be a priority from the beginning

- Recognize local markets, economic development supports and entry points for revitalization
 - Exploit connections between employment and all other initiative activities
- Use neighborhood-focused intermediaries to change systems
 - Skilled intermediaries are grounded in residents' experience, have reform-minded partners and attract effective leaders
 - Intermediaries can also connect neighborhood-level change with broader policies and practices
- Create a culture of learning and self-assessment
 - Continuous learning is crucial for the partners to reflect about their progress and to refine strategies
 - Information can also be used to recruit new leaders and partners
- Challenge: Altering the balance of power
 - Lasting social change requires a shift in power that enables residents to mobilize resources, influence rules and control the systems that affect their lives
 - Nothing is more difficult for outside entities to support than this change in power relationships
- Challenge: Acknowledging issues of race and class
 - Undercurrents of tension about race and often influence exchanges between poor communities and mainstream organizations
 - These tensions have to, at minimum, be acknowledged to build trust among partners
- Challenge: Showing Respect
 - Residents expect their external partners to respect them
 - Takes broader importance if outsiders are perceived as not understanding or appreciating the conditions of poor neighborhoods
- Challenge: Honoring residents' competence as leaders
 - The skills that enable residents of poor communities to survive in hostile and dispiriting circumstances are important and valuable
 - Residents often feel that outsiders discount their leadership skills or underestimate their ability to learn
 - External partners are often caught between assisting residents and preparing them to take over their own leadership
- Challenge: Harnessing the community's spiritual strength
 - Faith is a vital asset in some poor communities and it can drive transformation
 - Religious faith can be a huge resource for change

**Comprehensive Community Revitalization Program: South Bronx
Surdna Foundation**
Going Comprehensive: Anatomy of an Initiative that Worked (2006)

Scope: Launched in 1992, the CCRP set out to assist a group of established CDCs (non-profit community development corporations) become neighborhood intermediaries. These intermediaries would coordinate the planning, resource development and program implementation that would address the economic and social problems that contributed to poverty in their communities. Although 6 CDCs were initially involved, only 4 made it to the end. Nearly \$10 million was raised for the project and \$44 million was leveraged by the end of the project.

Goals:

- Macro level: provide useful information to the CDC movement nationally about organizing and implementing broad scale revitalization efforts and report on those strategies that made a difference
- 6 South Bronx CDCs would receive assistance to being an incremental process of change aimed at strengthening the fabric of their neighborhood; CCRP would assist them to ensure the continued viability of newly rehabilitated and constructed housing and to increase the capacity of their residents to become productive members of society.

Theory of Change: Rather than an explicit theory of change, a set of guiding principles were developed that influenced decision making and planning

- CCRP will be a bottom-up program building from strength at the neighborhood level
- Its delivery system will be mature Community Development Corporations positioned as neighborhood intermediaries
- CDCs will not act as super agencies; rather they will work with others capable of delivering program elements
- The Initiative will look to CDC participants to actively engage residents and community-based organizations to obtain their support for the CCRP effort and contribute to its sustainability
- Each CDC will be provided with funding for new program management and outreach staff who must be dedicated to its CCRP effort
- Planning will focus on assets as well as issues and problems
- CCRP organizations will plan and do simultaneously so as to jump start their comprehensive programs
- Energy and resources will be focused on implementation of neighborhood plans and leverage for the projects and programs they set forth
- CDC and resident capacity will be built as a result of doing
- Formal alliances with state and local government to secure support for plan elements will be pursued
- CCRP will be both entrepreneurial and opportunistic
- CCRP, with its funders and CDCs will select evaluators for the initiative and will make their assessments widely available

Lessons Learned:

Program Launch

- Take as much time as necessary in the beginning to think through the assumptions and strategic options available that will inform its design
- Identify the strategy to be used to develop the essential working relationships that will be needed for the program to operate effectively
- Determine the kind of intermediary structure that will be needed to achieve the program goals
- Think through the criteria and process for how participants will be selected
- Obtain agreement on the working principles that will establish working relationships between the intermediary and the lead agencies
- Manage expectations both internally and externally

Planning

- Convene participants very early in the program; discover shared values and shared vision that will guide the work
- Planning will continue to be needed as the program evolves, and not just at the beginning
- Find and invest in high quality technical expertise to have a strong plan
- Good plans are better with additional investments in presentation and communications
- Trust that the communities with whom you are working will know what they need

Leadership

- Don't underestimate the importance of building early momentum and showing visible results
- Define the rules of engagement early on
- Be sensitive to the players and their work, hands-on knowledge, and have an entrepreneurial view
- Anticipate the need to make tough decisions; once the evidence is clear, don't hesitate to act

Key Challenges

- Making critical early design decisions that set the stage for what comes next
- Finding, managing and spending the flexible dollars that stimulate and fuel the creative efforts of community leaders
- Nurturing new visioning and planning activities that set the initiative's direction and are essential to community engagement
- Assuming a bridge-building role to connect expert technical and programmatic resources with the work going on in the participating communities
- Steering the effort with the entrepreneurial leadership needed to venture into new territory, solve problems and recover from mistakes

Neighborhood & Family Initiative Ford Foundation

Lessons Learned from the Implementation of the Neighborhood & Family Initiative: A Summary of Findings (2000)

Scope: Launched in 1990, a ten year effort to strengthen a single neighborhood in each of four cities and to improve the quality of life for the families who live in them. It was a demonstration project designed to explore a set of guiding principles and general approach to community development.

Goals:

- Support and develop sustainable processes, organizations, and relationships that would address the physical, social, and economic circumstances of poor neighborhoods and their residents
- Create synergy among development activity including housing, economic development, human services, etc. and that the combination of activities would lead to greater outcomes than any single activity
- Build and strengthen community leadership, resident engagement and informal networks

Theory of Change: Four assumptions guided the work: 1) the initiative would work from a local base, 2) an inclusive partnership would be built, 3) it would be a comprehensive approach, and 4) community empowerment would be emphasized

Outcomes: NFI increased access to some existing services and supported some new services in each neighborhood. NFI connected some neighborhood residents to jobs in the city, and jobs were created in some sites through economic development activities. All sites engaged physical revitalization including housing repair and infrastructure improvements. NFI leveraged resources to use for neighborhood improvement from public and private sources. During NFI, new organizations were created and existing ones were supported through funding, technical assistance and creating linkages between agencies. Neighborhood leaders gained critical skills and knowledge to improve their advocacy efforts on behalf of their neighborhoods. Finally, NFI was helped build instrumental relationships between individuals and organizations that often led to ongoing partnerships.

Most of these changes were achieved on a small scale and some of the larger, more tenuous changes may prove hard to sustain. The largest changes in the neighborhoods were most often due to significant “infusions of capital” and private development.

Lessons Learned:

Comprehensiveness & the Integration of Strategies

- Action should be guided by an articulated theory of change that identifies critical points of intervention and specifies assumptions about causal links between actions
- Comprehensiveness should develop incrementally with program components building strategically on one another

- Planning should be flexible enough to take advantage of opportunities without allowing them to fundamentally shift the broader effort
- It's important to maintain a balance between activities that yield short-term results and long term strategic action
- It's useful to have a combination of flexible funding

Collaboration and Participation

- Mandating collaboration yields limited value
- Clear incentives to offset the costs of collaboration should be available
- Expectations should be negotiated and made clear for collaborative bodies
- Residents should be represented in sufficient numbers to be effectively engaged
- Have to address fundamental differences in power through discourse that makes residents comfortable
- Assumptions and expectations about resident participation should be clear
- Engage in early, intensive, ongoing outreach and organizing to engage residents
- Not all residents will (or need to) participate

Funding, Sponsorship and Support

- Communication is important
- Consistency is important; changes to staff or program priorities should be openly discussed
- Dedicated funding and support for capacity building should be provided
- Financial support should provide adequate funding for agreed upon goals
- Exit strategy should be developed early on

Outputs and Outcomes

- CCIs can build capacity in neighborhoods
- Implementation is difficult; the process is complex and embedded in the historical context of a neighborhood and its residents
- Broad goals such as poverty reduction and systems change require connecting community-level efforts with broader change efforts

Evaluation

- Need clear expectations and dedicated funding from the outset
- Foundations need to demonstrate interest in evaluation
- Integrating local evaluation findings into ongoing planning and implementation is difficult
- Technical support is required
- Skepticism about tracking outcomes has to be overcome
- Resistance and lack of trust regarding evaluation are significant barriers
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Voices from the Field: Reflections on Comprehensive Community Change (2002)
The Aspen Institute

History of Comprehensive Community Initiatives

- In the late 1980's, CCIs were created to bring together, borrow from, build on, and revisit the experiences and lessons of previous approaches to community change
- They emerged in an era of new federalism which emphasized individualism and self-help and signaled a general shrinking of the federal government's role
- By the turn of the century, most major cities had a CCI in a least one neighborhood (including HOPE VI)
- After years of experience, the record on CCIs is mixed; although some valuable change was produced, they were not the agents of community transformation that many hoped they would be
- Sufficient attention was not paid to the capacity needed within neighborhoods in order to implement a comprehensive community-building agenda
- Common Characteristics:
 - They are initiatives, not programs or projects, with a prescribed beginning and end
 - A funder's goals usually serve as the catalyst
 - They have an explicitly comprehensive approach
 - They promote deliberate, community-based planning, grounded in the history of the community and the interests of community residents – plans are usually developed through an intentional local process that considers community needs, interests, assets and resources
 - They rely on governance structures or collaborative partnerships within the community
 - They draw on an array of external organizations for TA, research and other supports
 - They seek partnerships between the community and external sources of political and economic power
 - They have a learning component – independent evaluations are usually funded by the sponsor

Accomplishments & Limitations of CCIs

- Accomplishments:
 - Increases in programs that strengthen infrastructure and services
 - Increases in the capacity of individuals and organizations
 - Increases in resources for neighborhoods
- Limitations:
 - Have not transformed neighborhoods – did not have the capacity or resources to put all the elements in place or ensure that they worked effectively
 - Implemented as though neighborhoods had the power to achieve significant change in spite of the rest of the world
 - Ended up focusing on treating the manifestations of poverty that were caused by factors outside their purview – racism, funding, mobility, public policies and investments that isolate poor people
 - CCIs promised too much and were, as a result, judged by unrealistic standards

- Need a better understanding at the local level of what triggers change and how people can apply those levers at multiple layers of community

The ecology of community change

- Residents – individuals and families
- Ground-level actors – community groups and organizations that carry out the day-to-day work of community revitalization
- Organizations that provide support – funders, TA providers, research institutions and intermediaries
- Entities that focus on public and private sector policy issues, advocacy, and political change

Core Principles of Comprehensiveness & Community Building

- Comprehensiveness:
 - Models:
 - Being comprehensive from the outset
 - Organizing around a “strategic driver”
 - Taking an organic, incremental approach
 - Observations:
 - Comprehensive means viewing the problems and solutions through a comprehensive lens and approaching the work strategically – it does not mean doing everything at once
 - Comprehensiveness should evolve along with the capacity to implement change
 - Aiming for comprehensiveness means deliberately making connections across all aspects of the work and looking for opportunities to create synergy
- Community Building:
 - Models:
 - Community building as a means to an end
 - Community building as an end in itself
 - Observations:
 - Community building is an overarching conceptual framework, not a program or technique
 - Community building is not an abstract concept; it contains concrete elements
 - Build the knowledge and abilities of individuals
 - Create relationships
 - Strengthen community institutions
 - Create links between institutions
 - Resident engagement promotes trust and legitimacy
 - Resident engagement is crucial but not all the time or in every aspect of the work
 - The link between improved neighborhood leadership, connections between residents and organizational capacity and improve community-level outcomes is not well documented

Strengthening the Capacity & Connections of Community Residents

Developing leaders

- Essential to examine the community's existing leadership structures – both informal and formal – carefully; their dynamics and subtleties are hard for outsiders to easily grasp
- Participation in an initiative by local leaders does not always guarantee that neighborhood views receive respect
- Providing leadership roles for residents without training or follow-up does not necessarily lead to effective or powerful leaders
- Leadership development is an ongoing, intentional process

Creating social connections

- Creating social connections can be an end in itself, especially in neighborhoods where residents are isolated and lack social support
- Social connections can establish a basis for civic activity by fostering a sense of community identity, spirit, and pride that crosses demographic boundaries
- Social connections can link distressed neighborhoods to resources and opportunities outside the neighborhood

Mobilizing people to participate in community change

- Those residents who want to participate will have different levels of interest and ability to connect
- Mobilization takes deliberate, sustained effort and has natural ebbs and flows

Strengthening the Capacities & Connections of Community Institutions

Leadership around a community-wide agenda

- A “community orientation” does not come naturally for neighborhood organizations; it can be a new way of doing business
- Good leadership involves intentional efforts to coordinate activities and connect projects; doesn't happen without an organizational culture that insists on such connections and infrastructure
- Being responsive means adopting a different view of institutional accountability

Staffing of neighborhood organizations

- Good staff have an array of skills, knowledge and personal qualities that are hard to find – residents may have the strongest skills
- Chronically low salaries are a common barrier to finding and retaining high-quality staff
- Staff need to be trained in administrative duties and to recognize community assets and capacities and to incorporate them into the work of community building

Collaboration

- Collaboration can be costly both in political capital and time and energy
- In neighborhoods where initiatives come and go, disrupting local relationships and power structures, people are often protective of their own organizations and distrustful of others

Effective Governance

- Questions about who is responsible for decision making should be addressed at the beginning of a community building effort

- Funders are often not positioned to dictate the form and/or membership of a governance body
- Take significant time and support to create a new governance body for community change, and the form governance takes may change as the work evolves
- “vision keepers” can maintain the momentum of a community-wide agenda but they have to have financial and staff support. Roles of vision keepers:
 - Develop initial community plan
 - Coordinate the work of partners and multiple projects
 - Build and maintain connections across projects and across organizations
 - Raise funds and maintain fiscal accountability
 - Monitor the progress of the participants in the overall initiative
 - Keep an eye on the big picture
- Establishing an intermediary structure to manage a community initiative has high payoffs, but it requires independent financing

Attention to racial and cultural issues

- Every participant in the change process needs to develop the capacity to talk about the deep and difficult aspects of racial issues
- Neighborhood institutions have limited capacity to address institutional and structural racism or the ways that political, economic, and social privilege operate to marginalize people of color
- Racial inequities exist within and among local community building organizations

Strengthening the System of Supports

Funding:

- Biggest gap for funding is in core operations; grant cycles are too short
- The power imbalances between funders and grantees can lead to conflict

Technical Assistance:

- Technical assistance must build organizations’ internal capacity, not just help with specific problems
- Long-term outcomes (statistically significant changes in indicators) are unlikely to be demonstrable within funders’ timeframes; critical to identify interim outcomes
- Evaluators are more likely to become engaged earlier in the process which can lead to its own challenges and they can often be in a position of having to evaluate what they helped to create
- Tension remains between evaluators and those being evaluated
- Creating a “learning community” can help support the neighborhood as in instrument of social change; this includes building opportunities to shear early lessons and challenges as well as having structured evaluations
- Strong theories of change articulate the links between activities and outcomes, including *how* the stakeholders will implement strategies; CCIs focus on the *mediating* processes that can operate between the micro and macro levels
- Theory (as it relates to a theory of change) is not abstract – it is a concrete statement of plausible, testable pathways of change that can guide actions and explain their impact; good theories of change specify how various stakeholders will pursue goals at different levels of change (individual, neighborhood, etc.)

- Broad principles that govern these efforts (such as community, comprehensiveness, participation, empowerment, etc.) have not provided enough guidance for action
- Community change participants need to test new strategies, learn from them, and disseminate their results

Strengthening the Connections between Communities and External Resources

Broaden the analysis of the problem:

- While focusing inward on internal community dynamics and capacities, many community change advocates have not sufficiently addressed external structures which can enhance or constrain their success
 - Community organizer: “The neighborhood is the heart of our work. It’s the beginning and the end.”
 - Policy maker response: “the irony is that we’re missing the big things because we’ve seen neighborhood as the heart of our work. You’re not going to fix things just by what you do inside the four corners of low-income neighborhoods.”
- Easy to diminish, underestimate, or be unable to influence the power of external institutions, public policies, and private market dynamics
- A new approach should link policy, politics, and place on a metropolitan level around the goal of expanding opportunities for poor people.
 - “If you just do neighborhoods, all you’ve done is create an oasis in the desert.”
 - “The things that are changing through efforts focused within communities are the smaller things....we’re not getting at power, income redistribution, system change, etc. Do we believe that initiatives that don’t address these external issues make real changes for kids and families? My sense is yes – but only at the margins.”
- The challenge is not to give up the local-level work but to do a better job of balancing and aligning the two levels
 - Identify the causes of the problems they are experiencing in the broadest way – consider historical, institutional, and structural origins of problems
 - Identify sources of power outside the neighborhood that can be tapped or influenced to help the community – cast the net wide beyond traditional programs, funders, etc.
 - Develop strategies that address fundamental issues – find powerful allies, working with public and private sector in new ways and reexamine assumptions and biases that are embedded in community building

Finding Powerful Allies

- Develop alliances with national, state and local policy groups that advocate for disadvantaged groups – provides access to expertise and influence in the policy world
- Develop coalitions across neighborhoods to expand the base and the influence of political constituents
- Engage in activities that mobilize residents’ political power and use to influence policy discussions to increase the pressure on political forces outside the community
- Use a variety of organizing styles to build political connections – “hell raising” to “relationship building”

- Use information strategically – connect with universities and statewide organizations to gather and analyze information

Working with the public sector

- Long-term sustainability exists in redirecting the streams of funding
- Community organizations need a better sense of the public funding streams that come into their neighborhoods
- Look beyond financing to broad policy issues that affect poor communities
- Local government should be more prominent in community-change initiatives
- Involvement of top city officials can boost community change initiatives but does not always translate into long-term change – political rivalries, turnover in leadership and bureaucracy get in the way

Working with the private sector

- Distressed communities need deep pockets to achieve ambitious goals
- Greatest challenge is to connect with mainstream capital markets in ways that do not disrupt the community
- Funding is available from unconventional sources if people think creatively about community change
- It isn't easy to ensure corporate accountability to neighborhoods but there are some successes
- Poor communities are losing out in the rapid transformations of the private sector

Re-examine the assumptions and biases embedded in the community-building approach

- Political climate can narrow the range of possible strategies for change
- Community-change efforts, while promoting collaboration across racial and cultural lines, have not taken the lead in advocating for responses to the fact that all levels of the political economy sort Americans by race – institutionally, geographically, and psychologically.
- Have to address issues of social justice which are rooted in policies and arrangements of power
- The commitment to place-based approaches has underestimated the dynamic nature of communities – communities are not fixed and unchanging