

SOLUTIONS

F O R A M E R I C A

INVENTING CIVIC SOLUTIONS

**A how-to guide on launching and sustaining
successful community programs**



Pew Partnership
FOR CIVIC CHANGE

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The Pew Partnership for Civic Change is a civic research organization that provides consulting and program support to communities, governments, foundations, and nonprofit agencies. We help clients identify and implement solutions and strategies crucial to making communities stronger.

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The views, opinions, and conclusions reflected in this report, unless specifically stated to the contrary, are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, its funders, its advisory boards, or its fiscal agent.

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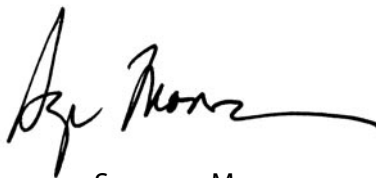
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Introduction

Finding solutions to tough community problems rarely follows a linear path. Rather, it is most often a blending of experimentation with knowledge garnered from research and practice. The resulting civic inventions are a unique product of trial-and-error.

Inventing Civic Solutions is an attempt to capture both the process and the context of proven community solutions. Each highlighted program was part of a national research initiative, Solutions for America, which set out to document the outcomes of existing efforts to solve some the nation's most pressing challenges. Program staff and their research partner (usually a faculty member from an area college or university) teamed up to document the results of these programs. In this volume, we asked them to examine their solution from the vantage point of invention and related lessons. The writers hone in on the critical steps necessary to create and implement successful civic inventions—from understanding the challenge, to designing and launching the program, to keeping the program on track through measuring outcomes.

Community inventing is critical to finding new answers to old problems. These writers provide evidence of change based on vision, creativity, and commitment. They have never given up. They represent the best in community work. Charles Kettering once described the difference between average citizens and inventors in this way: “Most people are interested in where they come from. Inventors are interested in where they are going.” We thank these writers for a very clear roadmap for future work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suzanne Morse', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Suzanne Morse

RURAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

HandMade in America



*How can we
develop and
nurture the
leadership skills
we need to
guide plans for
revitalization?*



The Challenge

Rural areas in the 21st century face challenges on multiple fronts. For some communities, the challenge comes in the form of rapidly growing urban and suburban areas that are encroaching on nearby rural communities, bringing interstates and strip malls that threaten to extinguish a small town's identity and heritage. This growth can also bring increased property values—a welcome source of revenue in one respect, but such “gentrification” of a rural community can also force long-time residents to look for a more affordable place to live.

For other regions, the challenge is not growth, but stagnation. As higher costs and lower prices for crops make farming a less viable employment option, many rural communities are losing population. Young people move to nearby—or faraway—cities to work and raise their families. Many who manage to maintain their residence in rural communities commute to urban areas to make a living, often leaving the remaining spouse to run the household during the week. There are few people with any time or energy left over to devote to local civic efforts.

In both scenarios the ultimate challenge is the same: How can our community remain economically viable while maintaining its identity and honoring its roots? How can we develop and nurture the leadership skills we need to guide our own plans for revitalization? These two questions are inseparable: in order to plan, carry out, and evaluate any revitalization effort, a rural community must attend to its own internal capacity to do so.

Challenges unique to rural leadership development include:

- Due to the limited scale of local government, rural communities often have to rely on an all-volunteer leadership base.

By Becky Anderson and Pat Cabe of HandMade in America and Margaret Carlson of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

- Philanthropic funding is extraordinarily difficult to obtain. For example, there is little corporate or foundation support for rural leadership development.
- Most leadership training does not result in true capacity building for small communities. In the typical model, an individual is sent away for a week to a university-based program outside of the rural area. This individual is then expected to come back and be the leadership for the community.



Rural Leadership Development



The Invention

An asset-based revitalization initiative for rural areas and small towns to enhance local economies and community capacity.



The Solution: Getting the Idea to Fly

Our recommendations for getting started are based on a few core assumptions. Communities are not built from the outside in, or the top down. Local motivation and commitment to renewal is essential, and an effective program fosters this by focusing on the assets, skills, and capabilities present in a community, rather than its problems or deficiencies.

Take stock. Begin with a community assessment.¹ Take an inventory of local resources and assets: cultural, architectural, natural, social, and historic. What is special about your community? How can you build on these assets to enhance the unique appeal of your area? Look for individuals with planning, downtown development, and/or economic expertise to assist you in your assessment. In many states, the Department of Commerce has a Division of Community Assistance that offers financial and technical support to local communities that wish to start a revitalization effort.

Invite area residents to share their ideas about “who we are as a town” and “what we might do to steer our future” (maybe over a potluck supper—food is a great incentive!). Don’t forget the people who live outside the town limits. There is likely to be a large surrounding region of farms and unincorporated communities containing folks who identify with—and have an interest in—your town.

¹ Parts of this section were adapted from *Small Voices, Big Songs: A Story of American Renewal* by Elizabeth C. Hunter and Kim Yates McGill. Asheville, NC: HandMade in America, 1999.

This community assessment accomplishes several things: it generates excitement for renewal in the community, it creates new conversations about new possibilities, and it increases the number and diversity of people actively involved in community decision-making. It forms the foundation for all subsequent plans and projects.

Form a steering committee. Who is interested in working to improve the community? Elected officials, downtown businesspeople, and representatives from local civic organizations frequently top the list. Don't forget the informal opinion leaders in the community—even if they appear to be naysayers at the moment. If not included, they're almost guaranteed to block

ABOUT HANDMADE IN AMERICA

HandMade in America is a nonprofit organization serving the mountains of western North Carolina with the aim of creating community and economic development opportunities based on the region's cultural, historical, and natural assets. Founded in 1993, HandMade has initiated and implemented award-winning projects including its series of Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina guidebooks; its Farms, Gardens & Countryside Trails of Western North Carolina guide; a Small Towns Revitalization Program; landfill craft studio incubators; and its education, leadership, and marketing training programs.

Community empowerment, resource development, partnerships, and local self-reliance are the hallmarks of the Small Towns Revitalization Program, an initiative that is aimed at helping small communities in western North Carolina plan and carry out revitalization projects that reflect their unique heritage and history. Leadership and organizational development are built into the process. Community volunteer teams learn by doing, applying their new skills in project planning and management to actual projects in the community. There is also an emphasis on participants in the program helping and mentoring one another.

HandMade's unique approach led to it being named one of the country's Top 100 nonprofits by *Worth* magazine in its January 2003 issue.

the process; if invited to participate, they can bring a valuable perspective and help the group think through all aspects of an issue.

Explore possible partners at the regional and state level as well. As mentioned before, the Department of Commerce's Division of Community Assistance can provide financial and technical support, as can the Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service.

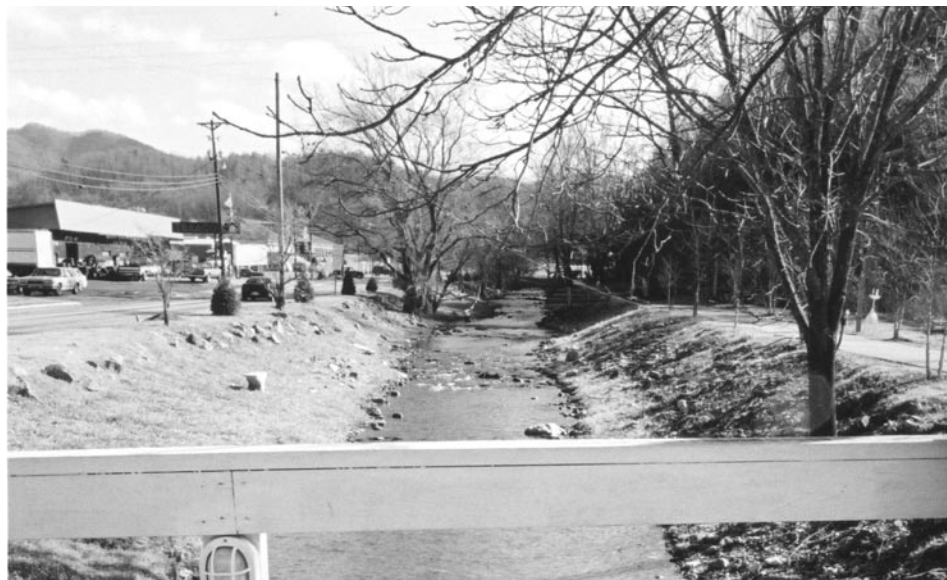
Create an organization. Once the community assessment has occurred and the steering committee has had its first meeting, many people want to jump in and get to work—meaning, start on a project. But one important piece remains: you need to “build a container” for your revitalization efforts. A permanent organization becomes the place to coordinate day-to-day activities and store financial information. It is the mechanism that allows your community to sustain its work and gives your program a life beyond “Fred and Bobby having coffee and talking.” As a nonprofit organization, it will also help you access funds.

Remember that your organization will need basic liability insurance coverage to protect yourselves in case a volunteer gets injured during a litter pickup drive, festival, or other revitalization activity.

Have a shared vision and a plan for renewal. The community assessment helps create a shared vision for where the community is at the present time, and where it is headed in the future. An energizing, engaging vision is necessary, but not sufficient. Many processes fail because they do a vision-



*Rural Leadership
Development*



ing process—sketching out the big picture of where they want to take their community—but not a planning process. A plan for renewal will give focus and direction to the dream of the future captured in the shared vision.

To carry out a project successfully, you need to map it from start to finish, including the details of “who will do what.” Think of the step-by-step guidance offered by a cookbook as your model; ideally, a written plan should have that level of specificity.

Select a highly visible, doable project. In the excitement of starting out, many groups want to tackle something major, such as a courthouse renovation. Highly visible? No question. Doable? Less certain. Remember that you’re working with a volunteer base. Look for places where you can achieve small successes, and then build on the momentum. Examples of small initial successes may include planting flowers or cleaning up a frequently used roadway. A more advanced, but still manageable, project could be sponsoring a festival or community event. Don’t underestimate the impact of the simplest project. It’s easier to motivate volunteers (and publicize your efforts) by racking up a list of small successes, rather than to set the bar too high and fail to reach your goal.

Be organized. If you want potential funders to look on your requests favorably, it’s imperative to establish and document your efforts in a way that presents you as a credible, accountable entity. Some of the basic steps in organizing include:

- Define an organizational structure, functions, and purpose
- Develop a mission statement, goals, and objectives
- Develop a budget; set up a bank account
- Initiate committees and assign functions and duties
- Write by-laws and gain legal incorporation
- Choose board members and leadership

Make it as easy as possible for people to contact your revitalization organization and get involved. Set a regular meeting time and place and stick to it. Even though plenty of work and conversation will—and should—occur between meetings, it’s important for volunteers to have a scheduled time for face-to-face discussions of progress, obstacles they’ve encountered, and so on.

Develop good working relationships. For most rural communities, paid staffing to support the revitalization process is not always possible. As mentioned in the first section on rural challenges, these efforts need to rely on a volunteer leadership base. Each project involves a new cycle of identifying what you want to do, figuring out where the talents lie, and finding the partners who can contribute those skills. The question “Who are possible partners?” is never answered just once. It is a continuing process of discovery.

Be creative in your search for potential and unusual partners. For example, on the federal level, the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park System, and the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission understand and share many interests with rural communities. The community college system is also an important, and often underutilized, resource in many rural areas. You are not imposing on these organizations or asking for a favor; on the contrary, the partner agencies also benefit from sharing their expertise and resources in traditionally underserved areas. Learn how to help potential partners look good, and you’ll both win.

Tourism offices and chambers of commerce are often eager to promote your community. You may also be able to take advantage of the growing trend toward “serenity seekers” in the tourism industry—individuals who are looking for a rural experience to soothe their spirits after the daily battle of urban living.

Develop outside resources. Many of the partners mentioned above are potential funders as well. In the next two sections, we discuss how to document your progress in language that is persuasive to private foundations and public agencies.



*Rural Leadership
Development*



Measuring and Adapting: Did It Fly?

So you’ve moved forward on your revitalization project. How it is doing is a crucial question. When selecting measurement and evaluation tools, keep in mind that the data-collection process, along with all other aspects of your revitalization effort, is likely to be done by volunteers. Therefore, there are two questions to ask yourself when considering a potential measure: 1) Will this give us the information we need to evaluate our progress?; and 2) Will we be able to capture this information without too much time and effort?

Recall that you are attending to two interconnected outcomes: economic revitalization and increased community capacity. It is possible—in



fact, it's necessary—to measure both, although the second is usually less visible than the first. The “hard” numbers on economic improvements will give you the data you need to promote your successes within and outside your community. The “soft” measures of leadership development and increased capacity will help you track strengthened relationships and communication, and the increased use of skills, knowledge, and ability of local people.

For economic revitalization, there are some standard measures used by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Streets program to assess economic progress in a community. These include the number of building renovations, public money invested, private money invested, and net job and business gains. (For other potential economic development measures, see the Resource List at the end of this chapter.)

While these traditional quantitative measures are certainly important, you will also want to track the less tangible—but equally “real”—aspects of your revitalization effort. Some questions you might use to assess increased community capacity include the following:

- How many citizens are involved in revitalization efforts?
- How well are newcomers being integrated into the community revitalization teams?
- Is the community team maintaining and/or increasing its membership?
- How are projects moving along?

- Are there smooth transitions in leadership? Or are the same one or two people leading everything?
- How well organized is the structure that supports the revitalization effort? For example, are records accurate and accessible?

One indicator that is particularly helpful to measure from the beginning of any revitalization process is the number of volunteer hours contributed. Even though it is more an input than an outcome, the numbers can add up quickly, and this statistic can be a very powerful demonstration to funders that the community is investing in itself.



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Development*

How to interpret the information. It can be tempting to collect information on your program only when someone is requesting it, such as a potential outside funder or a reporter who wants the information as part of a story about your success. These requests may provide some incentive, but remember that the main purpose of measuring your progress is to give you the information you need to make minor (or major) course corrections as you steer toward your goal. Some hints on adapting your program based on the information you collect:

- Look for trends, but don't put too much stock in one indicator of progress (or the lack of it). In a small community, a single business opening or closing can dramatically affect the net jobs lost or gained in a year, for instance.
- Keep tabs on the number of citizens involved in projects and number of volunteer hours logged. If these numbers are going down, it can be an early warning sign that citizens are losing momentum. They may lack the skills or knowledge they need to move on to the next stage of the project, or perhaps they are frustrated with the pace or direction of the revitalization effort. Monitoring this in the early stages gives you an opportunity to regroup and find out what people need to restore their energy and commitment.



The Ripple Effect: Expect it and Encourage it

When you are just starting out, it seems challenging enough just to identify all the steps needed to keep your revitalization effort going. It may seem like wishful thinking to project into the future and begin planning ways to harness the momentum of small successes to turn them into larger ones. But it's not too early to map out a plan for growing—in fact, it's

vital to document small successes so you can present them to a funder as evidence that the community is investing in itself. Here are some suggested steps:

Capture and share lessons learned. Before the memories of your latest project fade, take some time to sit down as a revitalization team and identify the key things you've learned. What went well? What would you like to do differently next time? Keep notes on helpful resources that you've used, including contact numbers. You (and your successors) will be glad you did.

Celebrate success. Don't move on to the next initiative without celebrating the successful completion of this one! Have a potluck gathering. Take lots of pictures (and mount them in an album that records the progress of your community). Take a moment to savor the good feeling that comes from turning your dreams into realities.

Thank everyone. With a volunteer leadership base, it's clear that people are not expecting a financial reward. Still, everyone appreciates recognition for a job well done. Be lavish with praise and pats on the back. In an era of high-tech communications, a handwritten thank-you note is as cherished as ever. Let people know that you've noticed and appreciate their energy and commitment.

Publicize results. Local newspapers and television stations are often happy to showcase the results of your community's hard work, particularly when there is a visible product (a gazebo, a park, or a new sign at the entry to town) and a story that goes with it (different community groups collaborating in new ways, a festival to raise money to buy trees and benches).

Recruit new talent. Now is the ideal time to capitalize on the community's focus on the success of your last project. Ask people for their ideas on next steps and listen carefully to their answers. Find out what they can contribute: Do you have a bookkeeping whiz in your midst who has been hidden until now? A neighbor with a backhoe? This ongoing process of finding out where the talents lie will help inject fresh energy and ideas into your revitalization efforts.

Identify your next project. If you have a written plan for renewal, you will already have some guidance on this front. But don't be so committed to your original plan that you overlook the chance to build on an oppor-

tunity that offers higher leverage. If a new business owner has expressed interest in sprucing up a downtown storefront, you may want to support her effort by moving your plan for planters and decorative streetlights higher up on the priority list.



Caution

In a small community, people can get too personally identified with projects, which can affect egos and discourage participation. Success can bring its own pitfalls: watch out for the “club effect,” which occurs when the revitalization team has been together since its inception and experienced some successes. Frequently, the team becomes the center of social as well as civic life, and it’s easy for other members of the community to see the team as an impenetrable clique.

Don’t view private properties the same as public properties. An initial wave of enthusiasm can lead people to proclaim, “We’ve cleaned up the courthouse square, now let’s clean up Joe’s yard!” Be aware of what is—and is not—within your control as a revitalization team.

Even though you need the involvement and cooperation of elected officials to support your efforts, it’s important to establish the independence of your revitalization organization. We found that in cases where the revitalization process has been part of the town government structure, it has been more at risk. The local revitalization organization should not be so embedded in the government structure that it falls apart if and when the political winds shift.

A final caution: don’t chase money for money’s sake! Often, fledgling organizations operate under the conception that a grant will solve all their woes. It’s very tempting to “invent” a project that fits a particular funder’s criteria. Before applying for any funding, make sure the project for which you are seeking support is part of your organization’s true mission. Develop a “litmus test” before applying for grants to make sure the project is a fit for your revitalization organization. Funds are always tight and organizations that chase after each and every grant not only dilute their vision and momentum, but also may wind up making enemies of other organizations that may be more deserving of a particular funder’s support.



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Development*



Summary

Rural communities are faced with negative changes, but citizens don't have to sit back and just watch the changes happen. With local motivation, a clear plan for renewal, and a basic organizational structure to support your efforts, you're on your way. Supportive partnerships, projects designed for early successes, and a documented track record of your progress will help you get the resources you need to continue your work to make positive change.

RESOURCES

ON HANDMADE IN AMERICA'S SMALL TOWN REVITALIZATION PROJECT

HandMade in America web site: <http://www.handmadeinamerica.org> *Small*

Voices, Big Songs: A Story of American Renewal by E. C. Hunter and K. Y.

McGill. Asheville, NC: HandMade in America, 1999.

Smart Growth, Better Neighborhoods: Communities Leading the Way.

Washington, DC: National Neighborhood Coalition, 2000.

www.neighborhoodcoalition.org

Solutions for America: What's Already Out There. Richmond, VA: Pew Partnership for Civic Change, 2002:

www.pew-partnership.org/

ON COMMUNITY BUILDING

Community Tool Box: Bringing Solutions to Light:

ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/

Coming Together: Building Community Collaboration and Consensus:

www.communitycollaboration.net/

McKnight, J. L. and Kretzman, J. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A*

Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets. Chicago, IL: ACTA

Publications, 1993. Phone 800.397.2282.

Morse, S. W. *Smart Communities: How Citizens and Local Leaders Can Use Strategic Thinking to Build a Brighter Future.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

ON RURAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Center for the Study of Rural America:

www.kc.frb.org

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development:

www.heartlandcenter.info/

Pew Partnership for Civic Change:

www.pew-partnership.org/leadershipplenty/

Southern Rural Development Center:

srdc.msstate.edu/

North Central Regional Center for Rural Development:

www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/

Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development:

www.cas.nercrd.psu.edu/

Western Rural Development Center:

extension.usu.edu/WRDC/

SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH PROGRAMS

Dental Health for Arlington



*Tooth decay affects
50 percent of
first graders and
results in almost
52 million missed
school hours.*



The Challenge

Tooth decay is the most prevalent chronic childhood disease, affecting 50 percent of first graders and resulting in almost 52 million missed school hours. Dental decay, pain, or infection can cause eating, learning, and speech problems for children, which can negatively impact their interactions with friends and family. Children living in poverty, who lack access to appropriate dental services, suffer disproportionately from oral disease. Poor children suffer twice as much from dental decay as their more affluent peers, and their disease is more likely to be untreated (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). How can children living in or near poverty gain access to dental services in order to improve their overall health, their interactions with others, and their ability to learn in school?

Health screening, education, and prevention programs are cost-effective and improve the overall health of those who participate. Among parents and guardians, one of the most often cited reasons for not participating in programs specifically designed for children is monetary: parents and other caregivers may be low-income, uninsured, or underinsured. Further, with no transportation or employment that precludes absence from the workplace, it may be impossible for parents to take children to the program. To overcome these barriers, health screening, education, and prevention programs must be

- Free or very low cost,
- Located where children congregate consistently and in large numbers, and
- Approved by parents/guardians.

By Sally Hopper and Debra Maness of Dental Health for Arlington and Carolyn L. Cason of the University of Texas-Arlington

A school-based program is one solution to meeting the challenge of improved health for the nation's children. Our suggestions for designing, implementing and evaluating a school-based program derive from our experiences with a highly successful school-based dental health program but can be tailored to address a range of health issues.



The Invention

A school-based program to improve the health of disadvantaged children.



The Solution: Getting the Idea to Fly

Launching a program requires research, planning, outreach, and a mission and goals statement that is measurable. These activities can be broken into concrete tasks.



*School-based
Health Programs*

Gather information. Collect information about the prevalence, incidence, and severity of preventable health problems among the children to be served. What are the undesirable and adverse outcomes of the health problems when they go untreated? What are the consequences associated with untreated health problems? How are school performance, socialization, and responsible citizenship affected when these specific health problems are untreated?

What health problems are currently being addressed and by whom? What programs already exist in the schools? What other community groups and agencies provide services or assistance? What is the nature and extent of their contributions? Where are the gaps? Why do these gaps exist?

How are current services funded? How might a school-based service be funded? What are other sources of funds for a school-based program?

Seek information from the local United Way, community planning groups, state and local health departments, healthcare providers, civic and service organizations such as the Junior League and Rotary International, local governmental leaders, professional schools affiliated with universities and colleges, and individuals from the school district.

Define the service/program to be provided. Identify the health need(s) or problem(s) that the program/service will address. Determine what specific services will be provided, when, by whom, where, and how will they be paid for. Start small with a formal plan for growth.

Get help. Begin with a small interest group and grow strategically. Create an advisory board or board of directors as you grow. Early recruits should be representatives from the schools. Consider for membership the director of school nurses, members of the school board, and the superintendent. Seek representatives who speak for the entire school district or multiple school districts. Consider adding a representative from one or more of the groups or organizations from which you obtained information about the health problems among children. Think about recruiting medical practitioners and teachers employed by local colleges and universities.

Identify local and regional individuals who are known as spokespersons for children's health, school-based health programs, and/or the specific health problems that will be targeted. Also add to the advi-

ABOUT DENTAL HEALTH FOR ARLINGTON

Dental Health for Arlington is a nonprofit organization located in Arlington, TX, providing dental care to low-income people. Its SMILES program is a school-based preventive dental program that provides oral health education and a new toothbrush to second, third, and sixth grade children in public schools in which at least half of the students are enrolled in the federal free lunch program. Using portable dental equipment, a volunteer dentist screens each child. With parental permission, a hygienist applies sealant to each child's healthy first molars; sealants are almost 100% effective in preventing cavities.

During its nine-year history, thousands of children have benefited from the SMILES program. It has cut the rate of severe tooth decay (pain, swelling and infection) in local children from 16% to 8%. For those children with severe decay, DHA research indicates significantly poorer classroom performance and behavior as judged by classroom teachers than for children in need of only routine care. Problems of cost, transportation, and lost work time for parents are avoided by providing these free services in the schools. Taking affordable health services into the schools has proven to be an extremely efficient and cost-effective way to improve the oral health of our county's low-income children.



*School-based
Health Programs*



sory board healthcare providers with expertise in the specific health problem(s) the program will address. Consider recruiting these individuals to serve as members of the advisory boards—but only if their interests coincide with those of the planning group/advisory board. Engage the advisory board in developing or refining the organization’s mission and goals. Be sure the board understands what you are trying to do.

Plan a legal strategy. Identify the legal requirements for providing the specific health program/service within schools to minors. What parental rights must be observed and preserved? What healthcare provider licensing and liability issues are associated with specific health programs? How will you assure privacy and confidentiality to program/service recipients? Add an attorney to the advisory board.

Resolve ethical issues. Clarify what services can and will be provided and how those that can’t be done will be managed. Not all needs of the children can or will be met by the health program/service. What, if anything, will be done about these other needs? Are there other agencies that can and will meet these needs? Advisory board members recruited from among healthcare providers, civic and service organizations, attorneys, and community planners can help address these issues.

Prepare both rational and emotional appeals for support. What is the prevalence, incidence, and severity of the targeted preventable health problem(s) among school children in general and in the schools in which the program will be offered? What specific benefits are known to accrue by providing the proposed service? What costs will be incurred? What is the cost-benefit ratio? Enlist the help of the reference librarians employed by colleges and universities that offer healthcare provider training. Surf the world wide web to obtain information about school-based programs and models. Check governmental and professional association web sites for information about the health problem, best practices in providing care, and resources to support service delivery efforts. (A listing of useful websites is provided in the resource section.)

Prepare the emotional appeal for support. Capture the health problem graphically. Add to the advisory board a representative from the news media and/or advertising industry. Use their expertise to develop and manage an information campaign about the health problem and the school-based program.

Finance the program/service. Funds are needed for start-up, maintenance, and growth. Because funding is an ongoing challenge, it is an everyday operational concern and activity. You will need to use both rational and emotional appeals for support. Identify all potential sources of funds. Systematically and periodically visit with each potential source to solicit funds. Are there state or federal programs that pay for the types of services to be provided? What are their requirements for eligibility? What are the methods of obtaining reimbursement for services? Consider the benefits of creating a nonprofit corporation to manage and administer the program/service. Tap local funding sources that may be available in your community, such as the school district, the hospital district, charitable organizations (United Way), local businesses, foundations, including health foundations, and individual philanthropists. Seek contributions from medical supply companies, manufacturers of medical supplies and equipment, local providers, professional provider organizations, and civic and service organizations. Seek monetary, product, and service contributions. The funding strategy must be very broad-based to capitalize on both one-time and continuing sources of funds. Use one-time sources of support to purchase capital equipment. Use on-going sources of support to finance everyday operations.



*School-based
Health Programs*

Recruit appropriate partners. Consider both the benefits and liabilities of enlisting partners. What specifically is the basis for partnership? What is gained by creating the partnership? Formalize any and all partnerships with letters of agreement and/or contracts.

Identify who will be served. What criteria do potential recipients (age, socio-economic status) need to meet in order to be eligible for the program/service? What geographic area will be served? What criteria will you use in selecting schools to participate? What do prospective recipients have to do to prove that they are eligible for services and how will that proof be recorded? What criteria or guidelines will be used to assess fees for services? Do recipients or their parents/legal guardians have special communication needs? Do all speak and read English? If not, what are the other major languages? How will program services be communicated to accommodate those who do not speak or read English?

Create a physical identity. An “office” and a phone number (with answering machine) directly associated with the program establish the program’s identity. Seek contributed space and office equipment from the school district, local charitable organizations, or city and county governments. Check out governmental “warehouse sales” for useable, inexpensive office equipment and furnishings. Check with local businesses and industries to get contributions of computers and office equipment.

Hire staff and enlist volunteers. At least two types of individuals are needed: an administrator and a healthcare provider. The administrator should “run the business” with responsibility for the financial and strategic affairs of the program. The healthcare provider should “deliver the service” with responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating the program. Plan for growth of staff and budget as demand for the program/service grows.

The program administrator and the director of the advisory board are key to the success of the organization; choose them for their ability to create an effective organization and organizational environment.

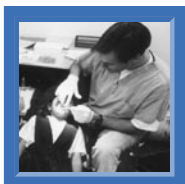
Seek volunteers to help with the program. Volunteers should be sought from among healthcare providers, members of professional healthcare provider groups, members of civic and charitable organizations, and members of service organizations and groups. Consult with

local universities and colleges about service learning programs and how your organization meets their requirements. Offer training opportunities to students enrolled in local healthcare provider training programs. From among volunteers, seek individuals who speak the predominant languages other than English to help with interpretation and materials translation.

Set up record-keeping and referral systems. Records should provide information about the characteristics of those served (age, race or ethnicity, gender, income category, payment ability) and the services that they received. All record-keeping systems should conform to federal and state requirements for privacy and confidentiality (e.g., Health Information Privacy and Portability Act [www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa]).

Establish a referral system. Invariably those who seek services will have health problems that are not included in the school-based program. Some of these health problems may be acute and in need of relatively immediate attention. Communicate the need to the recipients and to their parents/legal guardians. Include information about the availability of services (what, who, and where). Identify those that are free or low cost.





*School-based
Health Programs*

Establish and maintain community awareness and support. Continue to use both rational and emotional appeals to inform community, business, and city and county governmental leaders about the program, its need, its contributions to the community, and its outcomes. Plan and implement an active media campaign. Take advantage of all opportunities for which there is no cost, such as human interest stories and features in print and broadcast media. During national awareness campaigns, plan a special event that features the program and engages children's interest. Invite broadcast and newspaper representatives to these events. Recruit local and regional "personalities" to participate.

Advertise success. Collect anecdotal evidence that reflects positively on the program; stories that show quantitative results or engaging human interest stories. The advisory board members recruited from among the media and/or advertising industry can provide guidance. Successful programs get attention.

Seek political support. Find opportunities to inform local elected officials about the program. Use both rational and emotional appeals but also hard facts to inform elected officials. Provide information about the program to local business and civic organizations. Depict the economic implications of short-term and long-term program benefits.



Measuring and Adapting: Did It Fly?

Develop and implement a program/service evaluation plan. Define what, who, how, and when evaluation will take place. Ask for assistance in evaluating the program from among faculty employed within healthcare provider training programs. Add healthcare providers with expertise in evaluation to the advisory board. At least annually, share summaries of evaluation results with the advisory board.

Use the incidence, prevalence, and severity data as a baseline against which to measure program impact and effectiveness. An easy and necessary measure is volume: the number of children served and the specific service(s) provided. Volume measures help to monitor need for expansion of staff and financial resources. Capture program use by preparing charts and diagrams that visually depict increases in numbers of children served across time. Capture trends and changes in types of services most in demand by charting the frequency of each service for discrete, contiguous time periods (e.g., first six months, second six months, and third six months of the program).

Use your mission and goals statement to guide selection of indicators of program success. What measures provide information about the outcomes of program participation? What data demonstrate that the program benefits children who participate? For example, do children who participate in the program have fewer lost school days than do children who do not participate in the program? Consider other indicators such as classroom performance, classroom behavior, truancy, decreased number and severity of health complications, improved performance on health risk inventories, and improved self confidence or esteem.

Complete at least annual reviews of all data to guide strategic planning for extension of services to additional schools, increasing the number and type of services offered, the need for growth in personnel (voluntary and employed), and budget.

Keep a log of anecdotal evidence. Record the story, who told it, who it was about, and when and where it was told. Take photographs at every opportunity. Always carry a camera to take advantage of photo opportunities. Evaluate ways in which this evidence can be used to update the emotional appeal and how it can be used to enhance the rational appeal.

Compute costs for program services. For a global cost estimate, divide the program budget by the number of children seen multiplied by the number of services provided. Compare this cost with the service delivered by providers within other contexts such as private practice. Document how program services save dollars in both the short and long term. How does an investment now reduce future costs?



The Ripple Effect: Expect it and Encourage it

Look for opportunity. Create an organizational environment in which program staff and advisory board members are always thinking about ways to promote the program. Take advantage of opportunities to be elected for or nominated for awards for excellence from professional healthcare organizations, civic and service organizations, and governmental agencies.

Have the advisory board evaluate the mission and goals statement and the strategic plan against program evaluation data. What changes can and should be made? What and where are the weaknesses? Use the anecdotal evidence to explore benefits that the program evaluation

data may not reveal. Seek to document benefits beyond the immediate effects associated with the program.

Listen to the comments made by others about the program. What do they see as strengths? Shortcomings? Missed opportunities? Dreams? Benefits?



Caution

Champions and partners can become liabilities. Each should be recruited only if their allegiance is to the program and its mission and goals. Written letters of agreement may lead to successful long-term collaboration or peaceful separation. Whether fledging or robust, the program/service must maintain an active campaign to advertise its successes if it is to maintain and expand its base of support.

Volunteers may tire, lose enthusiasm, or move on to other activities. Examine the extent to which the program is dependent on volunteers. How large is the volunteer pool? How broadly are program responsibilities dispersed across this volunteer pool? A small or shrinking volunteer pool means that each volunteer will be called upon to do more. Engage in an on-going and active volunteer recognition program. Showcase volunteer contributions as part of the community awareness campaign. Make volunteer recruitment part of the everyday operation of the program.

Success can lead you astray. Periodically revisit your mission and goals statement to affirm their continuing relevance. Examine program evaluation data to assess compatibility with mission, goals, and strategic plans. Resist expanding the program beyond resource growth. Grow strategically; avoid the temptation to increase services or expand the program to other health problems simply because you have a proven record of success for the specific program you deliver.



Summary

Careful strategic planning that makes connections across public, private, and nonprofit sectors can provide a foundation for success. The community problems that your solution is working to improve did not develop over the short term, and neither will the solution. Stakeholders should be prepared to stay in it for the long haul. Research has shown that an inclusive form of leadership that emphasizes deliberation and participatory decision-making, by a diverse group of those in influential



*School-based
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positions as well as everyday citizens, will provide the most lasting results. Start out thinking small, working to successfully solve one problem at a time, emphasizing efficiency, and focusing on assets rather than deficiencies. In the end, the most successful programs are a small part inspiration and planning, and a great deal of applied hard work.

RESOURCES

The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools:

www.healthinschools.org

Dental Health for Arlington:

www.dentalhealtharlington.org

American Dental Association:

www.ada.org

American Medical Association:

www.ama.org

Citizen's Watch for Kids Oral Health:

www.kidsoralhealth.org

Share the Care:

www.sharethecaredental.org

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General—Executive Summary*. Rockville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, 2000.

CREDIT AND HOMEOWNERSHIP

Vermont Development Credit Union*



? The Challenge

To paraphrase Henry Thoreau, most poor people live “lives of quiet desperation” over the persistence of their poverty and lack of opportunity, and the hopelessness it breeds. In his book, *Assets and the Poor*, Michael Sherraden argues that persistent poverty reflects a lack of any financial base upon which to build a future. Existing policies that attempt to combat poverty fail to address this problem. Instead, they deal with symptoms and not the fundamental cause.

Policy interventions, especially through the tax system, do a good job of providing the middle class with wealth-building tools, providing a climate for self-help as people follow their own goals. Together with a competitive banking system, this creates an infrastructure that leverages individual motivation and capital to achieve private as well as public objectives. By contrast, policy interventions for people of low wealth consist of a top-down structure typically delivered via income/eligibility testing, grants, and entitlement programs. This approach perpetuates dependency and is compounded by continual shortage of funds, since the public sector and private philanthropy can never meet the total “need.”

The underlying assumption of these policies is that poor people cannot be trusted to set their own goals and that government must do it for them. In addition, we lack the infrastructure for the poor to obtain fair and affordable financial services—what former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers called the “passport to the modern economy.” Many

We lack the infrastructure for the poor to obtain fair and affordable financial services.

*By Caryl Stewart and Antonia Bullard of the Vermont Development Credit Union (*now called Opportunities Credit Union) and Jane Kolodinsky of the Department of Community Development and Applied Economics of the University of Vermont.*

social problems—poor housing conditions, lack of education and training, limited work and income opportunities, and family instability—find roots in this lack of fair and affordable financial services.

An estimated ten million families do not have an insured account with a depository financial institution and cannot begin to conduct basic transactions or build wealth through savings and market-rate borrowing. While the middle class and wealthy enjoy tax and other incentives to save and invest in home ownership and retirement assets, those with minimal or negative wealth lack opportunities or incentives to save and invest. Mainstream financial institutions increasingly target their services to higher-income clients, reducing “high-touch” services and charging higher fees and interest rates to those whose balances do not meet mechanically determined norms.



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In our complex modern economy, where full participation requires the ability to finance major assets such as education, vehicles, and homes, the ability to borrow well has become an essential component of wealth building. Bank modernization, with its high fees and computerized credit scoring, increasingly cuts off people of low wealth from market rate credit. This drives them into the arms of the exploding predatory lending industry, where high interest rates and loan fees structured so as to make repayment impossible drag families into a downward spiral of negative wealth, anxiety, and hopelessness.

Solving these problems requires changes in both our public and financial infrastructures of policies, programs, and agencies and our financial infrastructures of banking and financial institutions. It is the latter challenge we are addressing at the Vermont Development Credit Union (VDCU).



The Invention

A financial services toolbox for underserved populations.



The Solution: Getting the Idea to Fly

A Community Development Credit Union (CDCU) combines the structure of a depository financial institution with the social mission of a nonprofit. It requires the skills and resources of both.

Although social mission dominates its purpose, a CDCU is structured as a banking cooperative operating in the marketplace. Like any credit union, it offers an array of financial products and services, is owned

by its member-depositors, and is closely supervised in all aspects of its operations and governance by state and/or federal regulatory bodies. It is much more complicated to create than a traditional nonprofit organization, and like any start-up business it demands time, commitment, and a sound business plan.

The business plan must be based on market research, including surveys, that confirms the need and identifies the size, locations, and profiles of targeted populations. In the case of VDCU, the need was confirmed by survey responses of nonprofit and social service organizations through-

ABOUT VERMONT DEVELOPMENT CREDIT UNION*

Vermont Development Credit Union was founded in 1989 by Burlington Ecumenical Action Ministry (BEAM) to bring capital and financial services to low-income Vermonters. Through direct loans to individuals and families, VDCU helps turn hope into opportunity and create wealth. Loans ranging from \$50 to over \$100,000 enable Vermonters to attain home ownership and better jobs, acquire education, and build small businesses. Affordable banking and saving services also assist underserved populations in achieving their financial goals. Nonprofit, member-owned, and federally insured, Vermont Development is the “bank” of choice for thousands of working families, women, immigrants, small businesses, students, seniors, and ordinary Vermonters. VDCU has 12,000 members in 205 Vermont towns and made 2,237 loans in 2003 totaling \$29 million.

A significant growth in demand for VDCU’s products and programs demonstrates the need for financial services among Vermont’s low-income population. In 1990, its first full year of operation, the organization loaned \$235,000. During its 15 years of operation, VDCU has loaned over \$100 million. Each year VDCU provides tens of thousands of fair and affordable banking transactions in the form of check cashing, money orders, and electronic transfers. VDCU’s success is attributable to its trademark counseling-based lending program and sound financial management. VDCU is helping to create a fair and affordable banking system for thousands of Vermonters. * VDCU is Opportunities Credit Union as of January 2005.

out Vermont. We later directly surveyed low-income populations and conducted focus groups with people of low wealth. These provided information about current financial habits, the degree, if any, to which this population used mainstream institutions, reasons why they did not, and the hierarchy of their financial services needs. Focus groups also provided useful information about the range and types of their financial problems as well as geographic and other capital access barriers.

The business plan must include detailed financial projections. Balance sheet, income statement, start-up funding, and cash-flow analysis must demonstrate that you have sufficient equity capital, operating capital, and deposits, and show how and when the organization will achieve a break-even level of operation. You must design your basic financial products, including their pricing. You must analyze what mix of services will work, and decide what location, hours, and format you will offer. Your marketing plan should show how you will reach the targeted population. Your business plan must show how your CDCU will become financially self-sustaining, with adequate interest, loan, and fee income to cover operating expenses. CDCUs must consistently demonstrate safety and soundness to their regulators.

The fact that a CDCU is a regulated institution adds another layer of complexity to the business plan: the need to obtain a state or federal credit union charter and National Credit Union Administration deposit insurance. You should pursue these accreditations in tandem, using your business plan to demonstrate that you have the resources, expertise, policies, and legal structures in place to meet regulators' requirements. Once you receive approval, the regulators will designate your CDCU as a "low-income credit union," requiring that at least 50 percent of your projected members earn 80 percent or less of the area median income. This designation allows your CDCU to accept deposits from nonmembers and make use of a special form of long-term subordinated debt (Secondary Capital) to build your equity base.

By their nature CDCUs do not make large profits, so they cannot finance all of their growth internally. Some "high mission" services will not pay for themselves. As a result some level of assistance will always be needed to support the full expression of your organization's mission and growth. The preferred solution to this need will be to create or ally with a dedicated 501(c)(3) nonprofit partner. This nonprofit should undertake the planning and fundraising necessary to expand your capital base, finance new projects, and perhaps offer directly some services such as



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education and community development programs that are not, by their nature, self-supporting.

Your business plan should determine the order in which services are introduced. Lending will be the engine that supports growth. Be aware that the basic banking service of a teller station—deposits, check cashing, money orders—is not a money-maker and must be managed judiciously from the start. Begin by offering affordable personal loans for vehicles, education and training, household equipment, and family and personal needs. There is good demand for these loans and, provided you make them safely and efficiently, they will generate profit to offset the losses from the teller station. After you become confident and successful at the basic operations you can add to your lending mix. Home improve-



ment loans, affordable mortgage loans, and business loans all have high social impact and market demand, but are considerably more complex.

Systems and information technology play a much greater role in a depository financial institution than in a typical nonprofit. You will need to purchase a real-time data-processing system specifically designed for credit unions or contract with a service bureau for such a system. Your regulators will require you to have detailed, written policies and procedures for every aspect of operations and management.

Board members or volunteers from the mainstream financial services industry can assist you, but knowledgeable staff must be the mainstay and provide leadership. You will need to supplement traditional banking expertise with a methodology that serves your target population soundly and cost-effectively. Seek help from successful community development credit unions and banks as well as their national trade associations, but adapt it to your special needs and target population.

Funding your CDCU will require three kinds of money: net capital (equity), deposits, and operating funds. "Net capital" or equity is money that belongs to the credit union free and clear of any obligations. This net capital protects it against loan losses and negative operating performance. As the credit union grows, net capital must keep pace. VDCU attempts to maintain a minimum ratio of net capital to total capital of between 10 percent and 15 percent. By this measure, a \$1 million credit union should have \$100,000 to \$150,000 in net capital.

Deposits are savings accounts, money market accounts, and certificates of deposit provided by members and social investors. These federally insured investments are the main sources for lending. Deposits from social investors for community development purposes create a powerful tool. With net capital of \$100,000 and a 10 percent net capital ratio, a CDCU can attract an additional \$900,000 in deposits and build a \$1 million loan fund.

A start-up CDCU must acquire sufficient operating funds to cover the early period when costs outstrip income. These funds must be in addition to its net capital. Your business plan's financial projections will show the amount you will need.

The best sources of start-up funds are local foundations and private donors. Some states have public funds designated for community economic development activities. Regional and national banks may be a source through the incentives given them by the Community Reinvestment Act. As a form of a Community Development Financial



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Institution (CDFI), your CDCU can become certified by the U. S. Treasury's CDFI Fund (www.cdfifund.gov), making it eligible to apply for technical assistance funding for start-up activities. There are also some national "intermediaries" including trade associations that may be of help. Once your CDCU becomes certified by the Treasury Department you become eligible to apply for financial assistance from the CDFI Fund, which provides awards on a 1-for-1 matching basis. A small number of states also have their own CDFI funds. Find out what funding CDFIs are eligible for in your state.

Throughout the country, there are still only a very few "social mission depositories," such as community development credit unions or community development banks, in existence. You should find out whether one exists in your region before starting out on this challenging, but rewarding, journey.



Measuring and Adapting: Did It Fly?

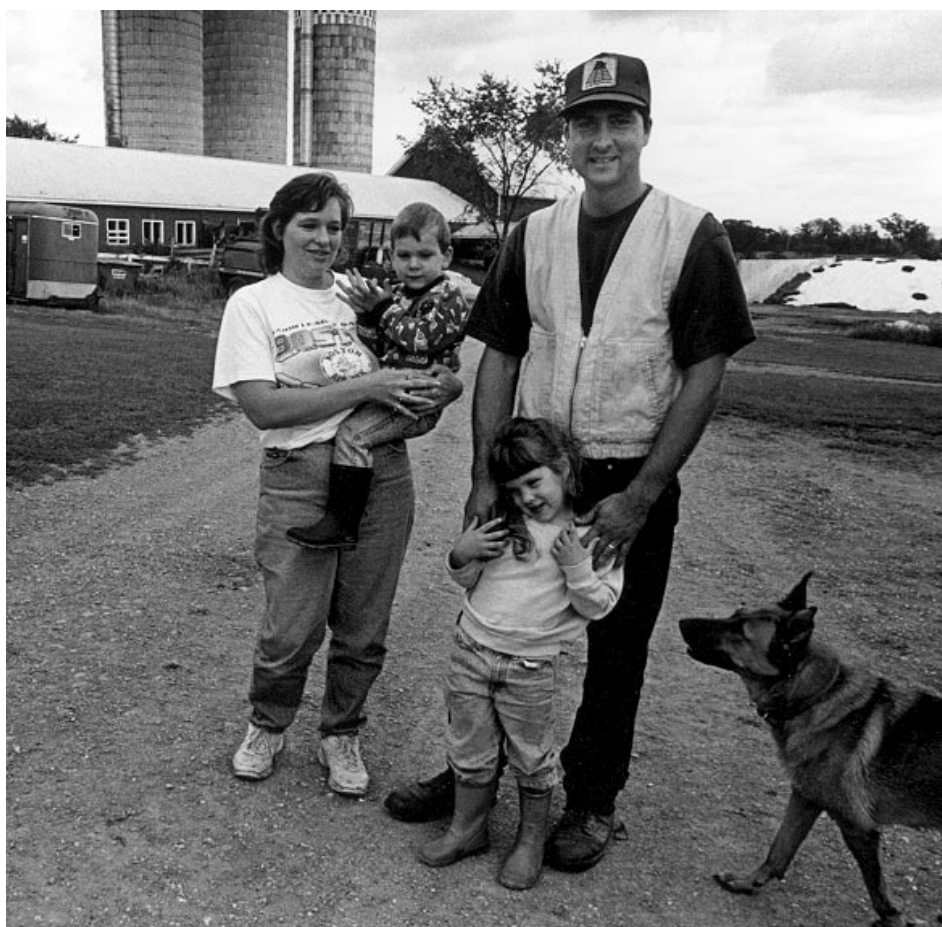
A CDCU must constantly assess its performance as a financial institution and a social mission organization. This requires measurement in multiple dimensions, including: (1) financial safety and soundness; (2) population and communities served; (3) volume of services provided; (4) economic and social impact; and (5) operational yield and productivity.

Management, the Board of Directors, and external regulators ensure the financial soundness of the credit union by continuously monitoring statistics like interest rate spread, liquidity, delinquency, and net capital ratio. Assemble an Asset and Liability Management Committee to examine forward commitments and associated interest rates on both sides of the balance sheet.

Measurement systems should gather and track information about the population using your services. This information will help you manage and grow your CDCU. However, the CDCU may not have the time or expertise to develop or implement these measurement systems. This is where partnership with a local college or university can help leverage time and money. Researchers often need to conduct analyses using pragmatic examples. For researchers interested in consumer finance, CDCU data provide a golden opportunity. A university partner can help a CDCU think through what information it should collect from its members and how the measurement system should be set up to make the data most useable.



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Research partnerships can also add value when it comes to analyzing output and social impact data. Such analysis may help you obtain funding and communicate how CDCUs add value to people's lives. At the very least, you will want to track the number and dollar value of the services you provide. These "output" figures are a first approximation of your community impact. You can also use them to compare your performance to that of other CDCUs and CDFIs. Measuring social impact is not easy, and different CDCUs will choose different indicators in this area. Among the social impact factors which interest funders are "banking the unbanked," building wealth, first-time homeownership, job creation by small business, serving minorities, and providing affordable alternatives to predatory lending.

Your management team should develop its own internal measures of yield and productivity to aid in budgeting and directing resources. As a measure of productivity, you may track the number of loans closed compared with the number of applications and inquiries received. As your organization grows, you will be able to compare productivity among types of loans and services.

Make sure what you measure is helpful in pursuing your mission. While it requires discipline, gathering key data and information consistently over time will guide your growth and priorities. Review your performance monthly, or even weekly. Each year, establish “stretch objectives” for key indicators that move your CDCU toward its mission.



The Ripple Effect: Expect it and Encourage it

As your CDCU becomes established, seek opportunities to leverage your work through partnerships. Your CDCU can be a powerful partner for traditional nonprofits by bringing wealth-building financial tools to common constituencies. Combining your financial resources and unique wealth-building expertise with nonprofits’ specific knowledge of their clients will create exciting opportunities for the nonprofits, their clients, and you. Here’s an example: Vermont’s community action agencies granted \$250,000 to VDCU to make loans for the purchase of used vehicles by their clients who were moving from welfare to work. VDCU had the necessary understanding and lending expertise to make these loans successfully and could leverage the \$250,000 grant with deposits to commit up to \$1.25 million for this program. To date approximately \$1 million has been loaned for this purpose.

At another level, you will eventually be able to partner with institutions such as the Federal Home Loan Bank, the Small Business Administration, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Fannie Mae. These institutions are under federal mandate to seek partnerships with community-based financial institutions and will enable you to bring powerful financial resources and add sophisticated funding products to your target population.

Over time, a long-term, mutually respectful relationship with your target low-wealth population will enable you to advocate for their needs, influencing policy in such areas as predatory lending, affordable housing, and small business.



Caution

To succeed, you must do more than simply open your doors. You must develop effective methodologies to control delinquency among an economically fragile population and to serve this labor-intensive market efficiently. Vermont Development Credit Union’s counseling-based lending system identifies and supports credit-worthy borrowers who do not

pass standard credit tests, and keeps tight control of costs. The latter is especially important with such services as the teller station and financial education that will require permanent cross-subsidy or grant support.

Your CDCU must be market-based, providing services your target population finds useful and is willing to pay for. Be aware of the anxiety and apprehension many low-income people bring to their request for assistance with financial matters. They may feel guilt and shame over their lack of resources. Therefore, a culture of respect must pervade your organization. This is as important as the services you provide. Recognize also that sustainability depends on achieving a balance in membership and services by marketing across the entire spectrum of low- to moderate-income households.

Working harder and earning less can be stressful on your staff. Train and support those who are committed to the mission and reinforce the satisfaction they gain from their work by creating logical salary structures, effective evaluation systems, and open communication.



*Credit and
Homeownership*



Summary

This country needs a social-mission banking system for its low-wealth population. Vermont Development provides a model. Our growth, as high as 40 percent a year, shows no sign of abating and is accompanied by a highly positive impact on the lives of our members, as verified through independent research. Further evidence of this need comes from national research and from such works as Sherraden's *Assets and the Poor*. The demand for fair and affordable financial services is huge and growing. The field is wide open, but be prepared for fast growth and the managerial, financial, and human demands that are its inevitable accompaniment.

GLOSSARY/RESOURCES

Community Development Credit Union (CDCU):

A credit union with a community development mission. Typically, CDCUs serve a low-income community or population.

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs):

Specialized financial institutions that provide credit and community development services to low-income individuals and/or distressed communities. CDCUs are just one form of CDFI; others include revolving loan funds and community development venture capital funds.

CDFI Fund:

An agency of the U. S. Treasury created in 1994 to expand the availability of credit, investment capital, and financial services in distressed urban and rural communities by stimulating the creation and expansion of CDFIs. The CDFI Fund certifies CDFIs and administers grant and tax credit programs.
www.cdfifund.gov

National Credit Union Administration (NCUA):

Independent federal agency that charters and supervises federal credit unions. NCUA operates the National Credit Union Share Insurance Fund (NCUSIF), insuring the savings of 80 million account holders in all federal credit unions and many state-chartered credit unions. NCUA also gathers, analyzes, and publishes credit union financial data.
www.ncua.gov

National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions (NFCDCU):

An association of 200 community-development and low-income credit unions.
www.natfed.org

National Community Capital Association (NCCA):

A national association of CDFIs, including many leading CDCUs.
www.communitycapital.org

Sherraden, M. *Assets and the Poor: A New American Welfare Policy*. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1991.

Vermont Development Credit Union:

www.vdcu.org

ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

Neighborhood Transportation Service



*It's more
than just
a ride.*



The Challenge

Transportation should never be a barrier to employment. Sometimes the simplest idea can be the most profound. Many businesses are moving to the outlying reaches of urban areas leaving behind potential employees who have limited transportation resources. Often employers take the approach that they are providing the job and it is up to the employee to figure out how to get to work. New or relocating businesses often search for a location with an inexpensive footprint and a large parking lot for their future employees but may give little or no thought to how workers without vehicles will get to the job. In many cases these are the people who most need the job: workers with disabilities who either can't drive or can't afford a car, workers coming off welfare who don't have a dependable car or have no car at all, and workers toiling at low-wage jobs who cannot afford the upkeep of their own car. If simply getting to work isn't enough of a barrier, many of these workers have the added burden of securing access to childcare so they can work. Many entry-level positions are second or third shift jobs, including telemarketers, restaurant service workers, care facilities aides, and janitors. All are traditionally low paying and require employees to work at night when public transportation is nonexistent except in larger cities. Taxis often are prohibitively expensive.

There may be many additional reasons why an individual will choose public transportation, such as environmental consciousness, freedom from finding a parking space and paying for it, or not wanting to impose on friends or spouse. However, it is clear that a large pool of actual and potential workers use this form of transportation because they have to. Driving is not a choice; without such a transportation option, they cannot work. It's more than just a ride.

By Michael Barnhart of Neighborhood Transportation Service and John Rogers of Mount Mercy College



The Invention

A convenient, affordable transportation service that connects workers to jobs when public transportation is not available.



The Solution: Getting the Idea to Fly

Those who have an interest in transportation accessibility are probably familiar with at least one group of people that is dealing with transportation barriers. An accurate needs assessment is a critical first step. Determine how people are currently getting to work. What public and private transportation options are available? Start with the local public transportation agency. Who are their riders? Who are they not serving and whom do they perceive that they are not able to serve efficiently? Contact with the local Chamber of Commerce or comparable group can provide initial access to local businesses to determine if some of their workers need transportation.

People who are economically disadvantaged often need transportation. Contact with a welfare-to-work program and local poverty agencies can help to identify transportation needs of this group. Get in touch with the local Workforce Development Center, shelters, and transitional housing programs. Look at a list of agencies funded by the local United Way and try to identify organizations working with individuals who may need to utilize an after-hours transportation service. Talk to all the local temporary employment services.

Corrections clients are another group in need of transportation assistance. Identify the local halfway houses. Developing a strong collaboration with such organizations can provide a modest amount of funding and a steady stream of customers to use the service. Often halfway houses have their own job developers who work with the residents to help them find employment.

Find out who in the community is doing vocational training or case management for people with disabilities. What organizations run group homes? Are there support groups in the area for people with brain injuries? The local offices that help to manage compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act may be a valuable resource for identifying agencies and organizations in the area that work with people with disabilities.

A transportation service cannot operate without dependable vehicles. Identifying resources to acquire vans/busses of an appro-



Neighborhood Transportation

appropriate size that are handicap accessible is essential background information. How these are acquired also influences the overall cost of providing the service. There may be grants available to purchase vehicles. It is also possible that they could be leased—for a nominal fee—from existing entities like the local public transportation service. Some organizations that consider such a service consistent with their mission may loan or donate busses. Even during the startup phase, it is critical to identify a source for vehicles for backup and service expansion.

Establishing an advisory group can be a great help in all of the above tasks. Its composition depends on the service. At a minimum

ABOUT NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSPORTATION SERVICE

NTS (Neighborhood Transportation Service) is a neighborhood-run transportation service in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that provides affordable evening and weekend, vocationally related rides during times when the fixed-route public bus service is not available. Passengers are picked up or dropped off at their home, work, school, or life skills class by appointment. The cost of a ride is \$3.00 anywhere within the NTS operating area. Childcare drop-off and pick-up is available as well. NTS drivers are familiar with area human service providers and advise passengers where assistance is available when needed.

Launched in 1994 with one minivan, NTS provided 566 work- and school-related rides in the Wellington Heights neighborhood. By 2002, NTS served the entire Cedar Rapids metro area and provided 43,128 rides using seven mini-busses and vans. Through collaboration with the local United Way, NTS has expanded its hours and now operates until 6:00 AM. Local residents now have affordable public transportation to get to and from work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In September 2002, NTS and the City of Cedar Rapids were honored with the Iowa League of Cities All-Star Community Award for their collaboration in providing off-hours affordable transportation at a savings of over \$1,000,000 per year when compared with fixed-route service.

it should include representatives of the major constituencies of the service. Sometimes overlooked but of critical importance is legal advice. In addition to helping to clarify and establish personnel policies, this resource can be critical to acquiring 501(c)(3) status and to meeting Federal Transit Administration regulations that accompany funding.

It is important to think of alternative transportation as both a process and a philosophy. The process is described in detail here; the philosophy may be less visible. After hours, door-to-door transportation is underpinned by a belief that people's work-related transportation needs have to be given both attitudinal and procedural priority. It is critical to get people to work. In addition, it is critical to create a service atmosphere that emphasizes the needs of the riders. Accommodation (scheduling, driver attitude, flexibility) becomes a very important part of the implementation of the service and allows it to distinguish itself from other options.



*Neighborhood
Transportation*

When starting an alternative transportation service, it is essential to identify the central mission and purpose. In the case of NTS, the priorities for such a service are to get people to work on time and get them home after work. This needs to be done in a safe manner—both when in transit and at the pick-up and drop-off sites. Depending on the climate of the area served, comfort may also be a consideration. Keeping in mind that reliable childcare is important to working, the service providers need to decide whether transporting the children of riders to care arrangements before dropping the rider off at work is within the scope of the service.

The number of staff necessary to start a transportation service will depend on factors such as geographical area served, hours of service, projected demand based on the needs assessment, and start-up funds available. There are two main tasks that staff need to get done: scheduling/record keeping, and driving/vehicle maintenance. In most cases this means a minimum of two people.

It is useful to consider initially locating the administrative activities in an existing organization that is compatible with the mission of the service. In this instance, staff are already available to help with taking calls, office space may be available, time on computers may be loaned to the service, and resources for handling budget and payroll are already in place. This type of arrangement can help the service to establish itself and stabilize, and to devote the time and energy necessary to actual provision of rides.

The person responsible for scheduling must be very well organized

with an orientation to detail and accuracy. Rides should be scheduled at least 24 hours in advance. This allows enough time to determine the route and make adjustments as needed. Accurate addresses and home and work phone numbers of riders are very important. The scheduler also must have strong customer service skills. This person may be the first to interact with riders and collaborating partners. He or she has to present a positive image of the service. Computer skills—especially in spreadsheet and data management—are a must. Accurate scheduling also requires knowledge of the geographic area served.



In a small transportation service, everyone (including the director and office staff) needs to be licensed and willing to be backup drivers. A non-hierarchical organization is the best way to assure this backup and cross-tasking. Maintaining communication among staff can be a challenge, particularly since the service will operate outside of office hours and many of the drivers may have day jobs.

Drivers clearly need to have driving skill and enjoy it. They also need knowledge of the geographic area in which they will be providing rides. Keeping to a schedule, anticipating the route they will travel, and being flexible enough to make midcourse adjustments is important. It is also important that the drivers consider it their primary responsibility to get people to work on time. They need to have enough mechanical knowledge to be able to service the vehicle at the end of their shift (topping off fluids, cleaning the exterior and interior, checking the tires, etc.). They also need to recognize when the vehicle may need more extensive work. Keeping the fleet ready for dependable service must be a priority. The vehicles are traveling billboards that reflect the quality of the service.

Considering the life situation of many likely riders, driver knowledge of community social service resources is also helpful, as is the instinct to assist someone in need. Equip each staff person with an extensive community resource guide and encourage him or her to make referrals to riders as needed. Make sure all staff are familiar with where to get assistance with healthcare, housing, food, childcare, transportation

as well as well other basic needs. By forging a link between available resources and those who need them, the service becomes much more than just a ride.

Spreading the word about the service is important. There are several strategies that can help with this marketing. Any of the following suggestions depends on the unique characteristics and location of the service:

- Put a logo on the buses and include a phone number
- Actively nurture relationships with people contacted during the needs assessment
- Get brochures to people/organizations who are likely to channel riders to the service (human resources people at businesses, marketing personnel for the public transportation services, staff at temporary employment services)
- Use media contacts to help spread the word about the service (and about any changes in the service as it matures)
- List the service in the phone directory—both under its own name and under transportation headings



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Funding sources vary and each service needs to explore and discover what is available in its area. The rider fee should be influenced by the income level of the riders, reflect a proportion of the actual cost of the ride, and be high enough to discourage “no shows” at the point of pickup. External sources are the main source of stable funding. Possible sources are subsidies by local governmental bodies and public transportation services, contracts with employers and agencies with regular riders, and businesses that subsidize employee rides to work. Daytime contracts that are consistent with the mission of the service can also help provide funds. There have been federal dollars available to subsidize rides under the Federal Transit Administration’s Job Access for Reverse Commute (JARC) Initiative.



Measuring and Adapting: Did it Fly?

Determining whether the service works is critical, especially in the early stages when there may be skepticism about its need or the workability of the delivery format. Set up a data collection strategy from the outset.

There are two major types of data that should be gathered: one is about the customers/riders; and two, information on the rides provided

and the vehicles customer/rider data should be gathered for every rider at the time he or she first starts using the service and at the place where they either sign up or purchase the ticket. It is essential to have enough demographic data to document that the primary target population is being served. If the needs assessment has shown a transportation need for particular type of household (e.g., single parent with young children, welfare to work, recent immigrant population), those data should be gathered. Income level of the rider as well as the type of work they do and whether it is full or part-time (or perhaps a combination of both) is also important. Especially important is gathering information on the rider's transportation-related barriers to working, such as their ability to get or keep a job because of transportation, the availability and affordability of other means of transportation, and if they have a car, why they are not using it.

After the person has ridden for a while, it is helpful to periodically gather some information related to their experience and satisfaction with the service (e.g., actual affordability, qualitative dimension of the ride, driver attitude, and relationships with riders). There may also be some quality-of-life areas that could be explored (e.g., increased level of independence, greater feeling of safety, reduction of social isolation through development of relationships with other riders). Once a year a more extensive survey on the impact of the service on the riders can provide valuable insight into their perception of the balance among work, financial, and quality of life results related to the service. Getting surveys returned is a challenge. Anonymity of the respondents can help assure more candid responses. Providing incentives for return of the survey such as free rides or addressed stamped envelopes can increase return rate. Also, if the riders have valued the service and it has really provided them a resource they do not have, they will feel a desire to "help the service out" in its effort to understand itself better.

The second major area of data to gather is about the rides provided and the vehicles. Most of this information can come from carefully kept scheduling records (office logs, driver logs, and vehicle maintenance records). Pick-up and drop-off records can identify the number of riders in any particular time frame (nightly, weekly, monthly), what areas are being served most frequently, where the riders are going, how long they waited for pick-up, and the length of time in transit. Those records can also help to identify cancellations and "no shows." This valuable information can be used to document the extent to which the initial

need is being met. It can also identify how frequently the service meets its benchmarks for length of wait before being picked up and length of time in transit. Additionally, it can provide information when the service needs to be expanded to an available rider population (e.g., requests for service that cannot be met, too long a wait time for pick-up or too long in transit). Setting up an accurate electronic recording system with calculated summaries and the capacity to import and export data between spreadsheets reduces repetitive data entry and provides crosschecks of the accuracy of the totals. It also greatly simplifies creation of reports to deliver to various constituents. Some scheduling software is available that may meet some of these record-keeping needs.

Vehicle records probably do not need to include more than miles driven in any particular time frame, fuel and oil costs, and maintenance. Often funding sources or governmental bodies will have additional requirements.



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The Ripple Effect: Expect it and Encourage it

By providing access to work, a transportation service opens opportunities that, for many riders, did not exist before. The number of hours worked can increase, a work history can be built or improved, there can be upward mobility within a job, and there is a chance to make career shifts. Stabilization and the increase of income can reduce debt and make savings a possibility, perhaps for the first time. Positive change in one's living arrangements, perhaps even home ownership, may come within the worker's grasp. Riders can experience an expanded sense of empowerment and control over their lives. For those who work nights in isolated areas, there is a very real increase in safety.

Clearly, the transportation service is not in control of all of these issues. But it must see itself as a major factor in creating these kinds of opportunities for its riders. The service is definitely more than just a ride.



Caution

The biggest challenge to a service of this type is the danger of overextending itself. There can be overextension inherent in starting the service with limited staff and vehicles. Once the service is successful, it will be asked to do more. Typical expectations are to expand hours, expand geographic area served, or enter into special contracts outside of the service hours as revenue enhancers or to respond to a request from a funder or major constituent. Each of these should be examined

for its consistency with the core mission of the service. For all of these, the negative impact will be felt most directly on the driving and office staff. The level of efficiency that needs to characterize this type of service depends on dedicated people, many of whom will be working part-time until the service gets established. Spreading people too thin will likely have a negative impact on the core service and on the energy and goodwill reserve in the service's human capital.

There is another caution that is also important. Having vehicles that are available and in good repair is essential to fulfilling the core mission of the service. It is unlikely that an after-hours transportation service will have the luxury of all-new vehicles, or even a deep pool of back-up vehicles. Caution must be taken to weigh the short-term gains of responding to requests that are not yet built into the ongoing workings of the service system against the negative impact that could actually harm the core service by not being available.



Summary

Connecting people with jobs via affordable transportation is a surefire way to support local employment and build economic self-sufficiency. Through careful assessment of residents' and employers' needs, strategic marketing, and constant attention to performance, an after-hours transportation service can complement a community's existing transportation infrastructure.

RESOURCES

University of California Transportation Center:
www.uctc.net

Federal Transportation Administration pages:

Job Access Fiscal Year 2002:
www.fta.dot.gov/office/program/2002/pfjarc.html

Transportation Resources for Employers:
www.fta.dot.gov/wtw/trfe/trfe.html

Welfare to Work (JARC Initiative):
www.fta.dot.gov/wtw

Some Examples of Existing Transportation Services:

www.dialaride.org
www.metrocouncil.org/transit/dialaride.htm
www.yubasuttertransit.com/darroutes.htm
www.bft.org/ifo.html
www.laketran.com/infodar.html

HOMELESSNESS TO HOUSING

Beyond Shelter



The Challenge

Families with children now represent 40 percent of the homeless population nationwide, and their numbers continue to grow at an alarming rate. Homeless single mothers often suffer from maternal distress and have poor coping and parenting skills. Their children also suffer from severe emotional, social, developmental, educational, and health problems as a result of being homeless. Public and private solutions to homelessness have historically focused on providing homeless families with emergency shelter and/or transitional housing, which alone neither end homelessness nor prevent a recurrence of homelessness for a significant segment of the homeless population. (Definitions of emergency shelter include stays of up to 60 days, with transitional housing providing stays of 61 days to two years.) While such programs provide families with children with vital access to services, they often fail to address the long-term needs of families in crisis. They also fail to address the lack of affordable housing. In addition, these programs rarely help families to overcome the barriers they face in accessing permanent housing (i.e., poor credit, eviction histories, unemployment, lack of move-in-funds). These factors often contribute to a cycle of homelessness for families, many of whom become chronically homeless.

As described by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, “Most families become homeless because they are having a housing crisis. Their primary, immediate need is for housing. Certainly they are likely to have other needs for services and to increase their incomes. However, these needs are best met once the family is in permanent housing, not while they are temporarily housed in shelter or transitional housing.”¹

Families with children now represent 40 percent of the homeless population nationwide, and their numbers continue to grow at an alarming rate.

By Tanya Tull of Beyond Shelter and Madeleine Stoner of the University of Southern California



The Invention

The Housing First approach to ending family homelessness helps homeless families relocate to permanent rental housing as quickly as possible, with the provision of the services traditionally provided in transitional housing provided instead after the family has moved into their own housing.



The Solution: Getting the Idea to Fly

The program methodology presents an alternative to the existing homeless services system for families, which tends to focus on the provision of emergency shelter and transitional housing. Perhaps more importantly, it provides a systematic, direct means for homeless families to return to independent living and stability in the community, while also providing access to longer-term support and interventions for high-risk and dysfunctional homeless families after they are relocated to permanent housing.

The Housing First approach consists of the following key components:

- **Crisis intervention and short-term stabilization**—These are often provided by the existing system of emergency shelters and transitional housing.
- **In-depth needs assessments**—Screening and needs assessments help identify family strengths and weaknesses, including those of children. Goals and objectives are then developed to build upon the strengths and meet the needs of all family members. The resulting “family plan” becomes the basis for both short-term and longer-term case management support.
- **Relocation to permanent housing**—Next, housing specialists (or housing relocation staff) assist homeless families in accessing permanent, affordable housing, including obtaining move-in funds and rental subsidies. Housing specialists also help negotiate leases with landlords on behalf of families who have multiple barriers to obtaining housing, such as poor credit, eviction histories, and lack of employment, and help to overcome discrimination based on ethnicity, income source, gender, and family make-up.
- **Home-based case management**—Once families are in their own rental housing, case managers focus on addressing their immediate and long-



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term needs, providing some direct social services support during a transitional period of time, but also connecting families to neighborhood and community resources and services, as needed.

Support services provided to families once they are relocated to permanent housing may include, but are not limited to, the following: assistance in obtaining furnishings, household management, money management, assistance in enrolling children in school and obtaining childcare, referrals for employment and/or training, tenant-landlord mediation, and parenting education and counseling. Families, including those with special needs, are connected to mainstream programs and community resources. This is particularly important for those in which an adult is in recovery from substance abuse addictions or families with histories of

ABOUT HOUSING FIRST

In 1988, the Housing First program developed by Beyond Shelter in Los Angeles, California, introduced a new response to the problem of family homelessness. Stressing the return of homeless families to permanent housing as quickly as possible, including those who are vulnerable and at risk, the focus is on helping families not only back into housing, but also back into communities. Beyond Shelter's Los Angeles program is set up to serve a large, metropolitan city. More than 60 agencies—shelters, transitional housing programs, residential drug treatment programs, domestic violence programs, and social service agencies—refer homeless families to Beyond Shelter for the “next step,” after they have provided initial emergency or interim services. Upon enrollment, families are: (1) assisted in moving into permanent, rental housing in residential neighborhoods, and (2) provided case management support for six months to one year after the move to help them rebuild their lives. To access affordable housing, Beyond Shelter maintains close working relationships with private sector property managers and local housing authorities. The fact that there exists a support system for their tenants motivates landlords to rent to families currently homeless. The Housing First methodology has been adapted throughout the country.

domestic violence or child maltreatment. Other families are able to function independently with very little support after the program assists them through the difficult first few months.

Prior to developing a Housing First program, it is vital to develop an in-depth knowledge of the homeless services system in the community; the approximate numbers of homeless families entering the system each year; root causes of their homelessness; socioeconomic indicators; the availability of affordable and/or subsidized housing in the community; and the availability and location of existing community-based resources and services.



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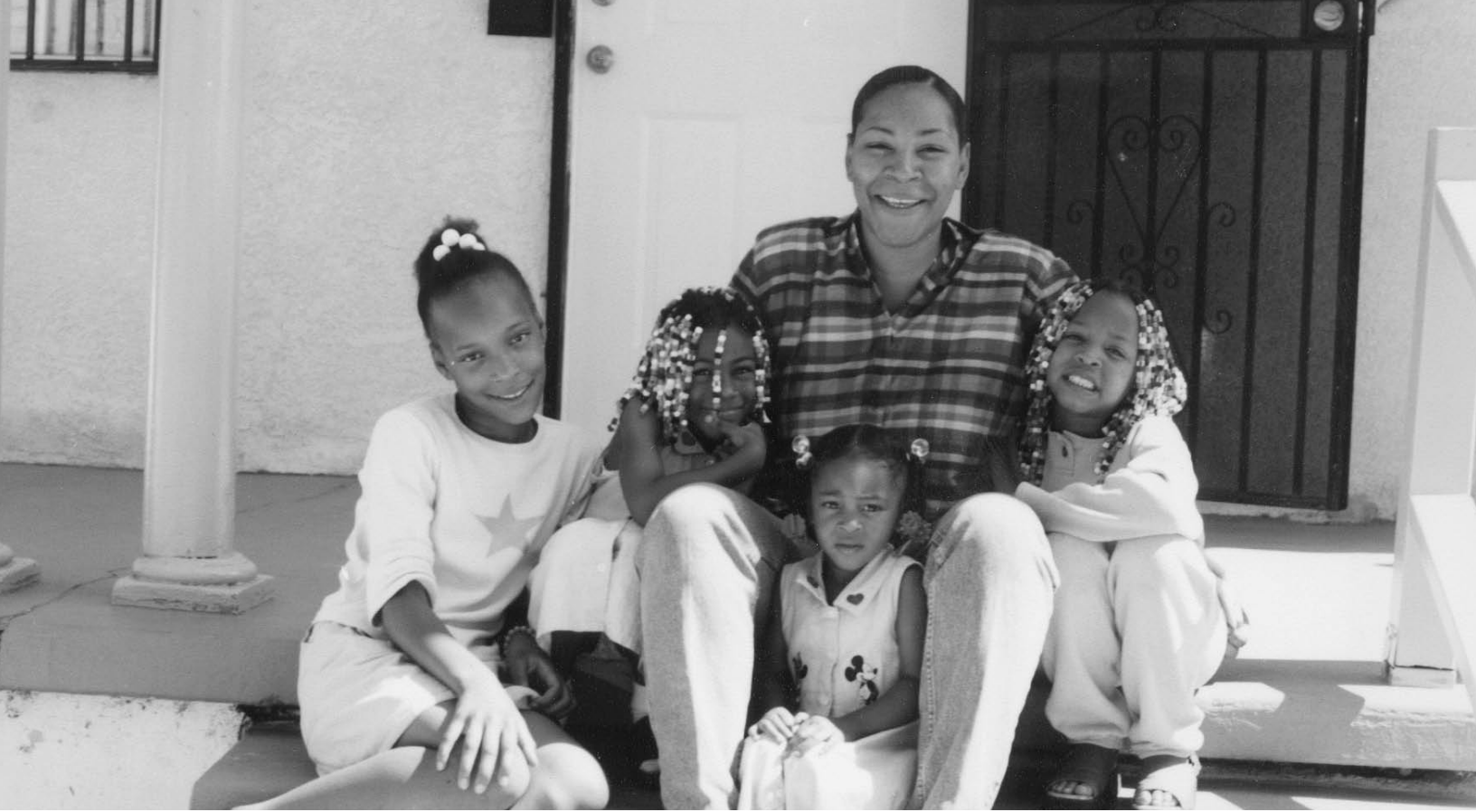
A Housing First approach can be adopted by one agency or it can be accomplished through the collaboration of agencies, each providing specialized services. As described by the Housing First Network of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, in order to implement the Housing First approach communities need to assess their existing resources.²

The questions that need to be evaluated in each community are:

1. What criteria should be used to determine which homeless families are ready for Housing First services?

Although some organizations focus on providing Housing First services to families who are more stable and are experiencing homelessness for the first time, families with significant barriers to becoming re-housed have successfully participated in Housing First programs. While attempting to target families who are most likely to remain in the homeless service system for long periods of time without such assistance, Housing First programs generally screen out families in which the head-of-household is actively abusing drugs, referring them instead to substance abuse treatment programs. Many will then enroll homeless families in which the adult has been in a recovery program for at least six months; recognizing that relapse may occur once the family is moved into permanent housing, early intervention by a case manager can prevent the problem from escalating while recovery continues.

Families who have experienced domestic violence may benefit from longer stays in transitional housing. Experienced Housing First providers have indicated that at least four months separated from an abuser are often enough to promote successful re-entry into permanent housing. Finally, many families who become homeless due to a one-time crisis, such as increase in rent, job loss, or family break-up, have the capacity to return to permanent housing rapidly, if given assistance with move-in funds and lease negotiation, or other types of housing assistance.



2. Who will be responsible for the referral and assessment of families?

While many localities have developed programs that provide a point-of-entry into a homeless services system, the vast majority of communities do not have an access point for families who become homeless. A single agency (such as an emergency shelter or transitional housing program) that chooses to integrate a Housing First approach into its existing services system might therefore become the access point, providing crisis intervention and emergency shelter for homeless families, while also processing families for early relocation to permanent housing. In a collaborative approach, referral and assessment might be provided by agencies currently serving families, including emergency shelters, transitional housing, domestic violence shelters, residential drug treatment programs, social services agencies, and rental assistance programs. Other Housing First programs prefer to do their own screening and assessments, recognizing that homeless services providers often keep homeless families in temporary or transitional programs for up to two years.

3. Who can provide families with housing assistance? Needed services include:

- helping overcome barriers to accessing affordable housing, including addressing poor credit, eviction histories, lack of move-in funds, and housing discrimination;

- locating subsidized or affordable units in the community and/or developing affordable housing resources through the private sector, including working with ecumenical, philanthropic, and volunteer community services organizations;
- developing greater affordable housing resources by working with landlords, management companies, and local public housing authorities;
- serving as a resource to landlords following a housing placement for housing-related problems/issues that may develop.

Agencies such as local housing authorities, housing counseling and fair housing organizations, and property management companies should be considered as possible collaborative partners.

4. Who will provide the case management services to the family?

Needed services include:

- providing time-limited and transitional case management immediately after the move;
- linking individuals/families/children with needed supports in the community;
- helping to resolve crises that may evolve immediately following a housing placement;
- monitoring families with special needs, i.e., those in recovery from substance abuse addiction, survivors of domestic violence, and those in which there is a history of child maltreatment.

In every community, resources and services differ. Homeless services agencies, nonprofit and/or governmental social services agencies, transitional housing programs, community-based recovery programs, family counseling programs, and child welfare agencies may be able to provide these services. Existing agencies are often funded to serve families in a particular community, regardless of whether or not they have been homeless, and should be considered as potential partners.

5. What funding resources are available?

Often, existing as well as new sources of funds can be used to support a Housing First approach to homelessness. For example, it may be possible to modify the use of existing funds during contract renewal processes, by changing a staff position to a housing specialist, or adding a component for housing relocation or case management. Possible sources of funds include:



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- Federal funding through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), particularly the Supportive Housing Program (SHP), and the U.S. Department of Education
- State and local funding such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), or through agencies such as local departments of social services, housing authorities, or mental health centers
- Private funding from foundations, corporations, and individual donors

Private sources of funding can be particularly useful in supporting feasibility analysis and strategic planning, in order to help homeless service providers to adapt Housing First components to their existing services system. In addition, private funding might enable agencies to hire housing resources/relocation staff when no other funding exists. Likewise, private sources can serve to “fill the gap” when adequate move-in funds are not available or can serve as “incentive” funds to landlords worried about renting to a homeless family.



Measuring and Adapting: Did it Fly?

Any service for homeless families must be measured by the attainment of permanent housing and the capacity of the residents to sustain themselves and their families in that housing. These two outcome measures pose the central questions for program participants, agencies, and the community and they must be built into a program at the outset.

Good evaluation systems utilize a series of short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. For example, for mothers, these variables might be employment, enrollment in a job training program, recovery from substance abuse where that was a problem, and overcoming domestic violence where that was a problem. Outcomes for children could be school enrollment, regular attendance, participation in an after-school program, and health and nutrition status.

These summative data need to be collected when clients enroll in a housing program, the point at which they apply to an agency for help with locating permanent housing, and when they move into permanent housing. This data collection strategy will enable agencies to measure success by comparing baseline and subsequent data.

In addition to the above outcomes, program evaluation can add reliability and validity when real and tested measurement instruments

are applied. A number of scales have been developed that can be used in programs serving homeless families. They are all in the public domain so that researchers or practitioners can easily access them. The following instruments are suggested:³

- Clinical Anxiety Scale
- CES-D Score (to measure depression)
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
- Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory
- Scales of Perceived Social Support



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Also, the National Alliance to End Homelessness has identified a set of questions that need to be answered to understand the nature of homelessness and its solutions. These are as follows:

- With what mainstream public systems have the homeless clients interacted, and did this interaction result in homelessness (e.g., poor discharge planning, inadequate after-care, etc.)?
- For those who enter and exit the homeless assistance system fairly quickly, what assistance is most effective in facilitating their rehousing?
- What mainstream services do families need after they are rehoused so that they do not become homeless again?⁴

Although the identification of outcomes, data collection, and evaluation are central to any program, organizations encounter numerous challenges to this process. Evaluation requires careful attention to the design and completion of every agency form from intake to termination. The data on each form need to be collected in a central management information system, which requires more computer hardware and software than many agencies can afford. This endeavor also requires staff that is sufficiently competent and patient with data entry, a serious challenge in many program settings.

Agency leadership must be sufficiently committed to data collection and measurement of outcomes to support the entire enterprise. More importantly, leadership must be prepared to adjust their program when the outcome data indicate a lack of success, e.g., families move into permanent housing but lack childcare that then endangers employment. One adjustment to this finding would suggest that case managers, and the agency, focus greater attention on the identification of childcare resources. Homeless agencies are finding

that it takes longer than it did several years ago to locate permanent housing. This must be accounted for in measuring outcomes and in working longer with homeless families until they find housing. Finally, outcome data may yield findings that agency leadership does not anticipate, such as fewer successful outcomes. It is generally hard for people who are involved to accept negative findings. This needs to be regarded as an opportunity for correction rather than a failure of the program or its personnel. In the final analysis, program evaluation serves as a guide for agency policymakers and planners.



The Ripple Effect: Expect it and Encourage it

To create or sustain the ripple requires a strong commitment to the basics of organizational development and effective program operations. Areas to focus on might include: (1) the target population; (2) programmatic excellence; (3) fundraising and development; (4) leadership and organizational structure; and, (5) collaboration with other agencies and organizations.

The Target Population

The most direct component of programmatic success is whether people who are homeless attain permanent housing and achieve the outcomes identified in their individual and/or family plans.

Programmatic Excellence

Programmatic excellence means more than achieving the desired outcomes for the target population. A second type of evaluation focuses on formative, or monitoring, evaluations that are designed to measure the effectiveness of an intervention and its efficiency. Formative evaluations focus more on the process than on the outcome of an intervention. Such evaluations occur during the implementation stage and are designed to improve the change effort. Formative evaluations do not address whether the effort is worthwhile or even whether it is more worthwhile than other programs. They focus on describing what the program does and what is happening during the service delivery process.

Fundraising and Development

Most programs for homeless families, indeed most safety net programs, operate on time-limited budgets in uncertain environments vis-à-vis contracts and grants and gifts from major individual and corporate donors. The uncertainty of future funding for even the most effective

and efficient program requires that organizations develop strategic plans to sustain funding and raise money. This means that every agency must have in place a fundraising plan that attracts funding (in large and small amounts) from individual donors, foundations, corporations, and the government. When applying for program funds, agencies should be prepared to locate future funding to sustain their program after the initial funding runs out.

Leadership and Organizational Structure

Strong support from top management and leadership is critical in implementing a Housing First approach, which often goes against current practice in a community. The organizational structure can vary, but needs to be able to accommodate both the components of the Housing First approach and the needs of families.

Collaboration with Other Agencies and Organizations

Collaborative strategies assume that it is better to work with than against the existing organizational system. Collaboration also assumes that the target system is rational, open to new ideas, and of good faith. Successful interagency collaborations can address weaknesses in current service provision by partnering with the systems and building upon them. A Housing First program must sustain and build its collaborative relationships with mainstream social service agencies, and it must focus on all of the key agencies in the homeless assistance system.

Within the homeless assistance system, collaboration with emergency shelters is central. Mainstream agencies are called upon to provide vital resources for homeless families, e.g., health insurance, supplemental security income, job training programs, mental health and substance abuse services, food stamps, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).



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Caution

It is important to remember that effective collaboration requires a lead agency, so that there is a designated entity to provide leadership and move the collaboration forward. This is particularly important when many different agencies are involved in developing a Housing First program. It is also important to keep in mind the different areas of expertise of each agency and/or each Housing First component. For example, in small agencies, it is possible for one person to carry out the functions of case manager and housing specialist. Ideally, however, a

housing specialist and a case manager will work together, each in his or her area of expertise. This is because the functions of the roles are quite different. Housing specialists, for example, recruit property owners and managers willing to rent to clients and maintain relationships with them on housing-related issues. This is in contrast to case managers, who may provide such assistance as help accessing community resources, problem solving, life skills, parenting support, and help with money management. Behind the scenes, however, they work as a “team.”



Summary

The ambitious scope of a Housing First program requires a strong commitment on the part of many agencies and individuals. However, with careful planning and assessment, sound partnerships, and an ongoing focus on the strengths and weaknesses of clients, Housing First can accomplish what all families need: an affordable and permanent home.

NOTES

- ¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness (2003). *A Plan: Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*. p. 3.
www.naeh.org
- ² National Alliance to End Homelessness Website, Housing First Network (April 2003),
www.NAEH.org/networks/housingfirst/questions.htm
- ³ Royce, D., Thyer, B. A., Padgett, D., and, Logan, T.K. (2000). *Program Evaluation: An Introduction*, Third Edition. Ch. 12.
- ⁴ National Alliance to End Homelessness (2003). *A Plan: Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*. p. 8.
www.naeh.org

RESOURCES

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The Urban Institute, 2001
www.urban.org/end_homelessness

Sommer, H. *Homelessness in Urban America: A Review of the Literature* (pdf) Berkeley:
Institute of Governmental Studies, 2000
www.berkeley.edu/events/homelessness

Beyond Shelter:
www.beyondshelter.org

Center for Supportive housing:
www.csh.org

National Coalition for the homeless:
www.nationalhomeless.org

JOB AND LIFE SKILLS

Taller San Jose



? The Challenge

Alex Ortega had just turned twenty-one when he was released from jail. He had served 30 days for petty theft. Alex had not previously been in serious trouble with the law even though he had been involved in a street gang since he was 16 years old. Serving time, however, missing his young wife and baby, had sobered him a bit. “I need a real job,” he thought. He was frustrated by the series of bottom level jobs he had held since he was 18. Besides, his past earnings didn’t begin to pay for even subsistence living for his small family.

What Alex didn’t know was that he lived in one of the most expensive areas of the world, where at minimum wage he would have to work 110 hours a week to afford a modest one bedroom apartment in a crowded urban environment.

Alex had immigrated to Orange County, California, from El Salvador when he was three years old. His mother worked in a factory at night; his father was a day worker, catching jobs when he could through a local hiring hall. Alex had worked alongside his father for the past couple of years, learning the rhythms of the day worker’s market. It was the luck of the draw. Sometimes there would be work for days—gardening, roofing, demolition—but there were more days when he and the other men sat idle. Day labor provided neither workman’s compensation nor employee benefits. The pay was uncertain, whatever the employer chose to provide, and always in cash.

Several days before Alex was released from jail, he had read a story in the local newspaper announcing the opening of a training program for construction workers in Santa Ana. It was just blocks from his home. He

Alex lived in one of the most expensive areas of the world, where at minimum wage he would have to work 110 hours a week to afford a modest apartment.

By Eileen McNerney of Taller San Jose and Olivia de la Rocha of Research Support Services

copied down a contact number and made the call on the day of his release. They were recruiting young men between the ages of 18-28 for the first training class. Alex made certain that he was accepted.

At the end of 14 weeks, Alex was at work on a construction site—his starting salary, \$8.50 an hour. Sixty days later he received a call from the nonprofit program that had provided his job training. An employer was looking to hire a qualified young carpenter to connect to the union program. Alex accepted the offer. Because of his previous training he was able to enter the program at an advanced level with a starting salary of \$14.80 an hour. Every six months he will receive a raise. At the end of four years, Alex will be a qualified journeyman carpenter and will likely earn \$40,000 annually.



Job and Life Skills

There are many young people like Alex—undereducated, unskilled, and without adequate support systems. In many of the urban centers of our country—where both poverty and immigration are major factors—the high school dropout rate can edge toward 50 percent. What happens when functionally illiterate young people move onto the streets of our cities? How do they support themselves?

The job base in the United States has changed dramatically in the past twenty years. In this global market, many of the historically predictable jobs in manufacturing have shifted overseas, leaving low-paying service jobs in their wake. The promise of high-tech jobs has been uncertain and the undereducated and unskilled often don't have the skills to match the requirements of the technology marketplace.



The Invention:

A holistic educational and vocational center tailored to the needs of young adults.



The Solution: Getting the Idea to Fly

When an agency takes on the mission of training workers and matching them with the changing needs of today's marketplace, there are several steps with which to begin:

- Understanding the job market
- Learning what the employers want
- Exploring your community's resources
- Finding your niche and getting known for what you do best

Understanding the job market

The job market in every community has unique characteristics based on economic, historical, social, and demographic realities. In order to serve your clients well, you'll need to understand how the job market operates in your community and what factors influence its ebb and flow. While the Bureau of Labor Statistics provides information about the current rate of unemployment in your state, county, and city, you'll need to dig deeper to learn about specific populations. This may involve searching for answers to your own specific questions:

- What is the unemployment rate for the younger population—those between 16-24?
- How do women fare in the local job market?
- How does ethnicity affect employment or earning power?
- What is the employment rate for those who have been incarcerated? For high school dropouts?

ABOUT TALLER SAN JOSE

Taller San Jose (St. Joseph's Workshop), a faith-based organization in Santa Ana, California, took on the challenge of training undereducated and unemployed Latino youth for the workforce when gang issues in the city were at a height. Beginning in 1995 with eight young people and a dilapidated building, the program now works intensely with 500 young people each year—providing training, work readiness skills, job placement, and job coaching. Taller San Jose focuses on three training areas—nurse's aide certification, Microsoft Office certification, and first level construction skills. The executive director, Sister Eileen McNerney, CSJ, attributes the program's success to focus and will. "We focus on young people," she says, "because Santa Ana has the lowest median age of any city in the country. We had to learn where the jobs were and how to develop the capacity to train for those skill sets. We never stop deepening and strengthening our programs. Most important, we stay close to our clients so that we're grounded and understand their needs. We're their brokers in the community and we never give up on them. They repay us with their success."

- What is the prevailing wage for various job categories?
- What is the most common wage for beginning or inexperienced workers?

Learning What the Employer Wants

Employers have nearly universal expectations about the work ethic of their potential employees. They want to hire people who will show up every day, on time, drug free, with a good attitude. “Present those people to me,” says a local manufacturer, “and we can train them to do what is required.” Other employers have more specific requirements—for safety and efficiency they want employees who understand and communicate in English.

While these seem like simple requirements, they are often significant hurdles for young people who have not worked before, for those who have been unemployed for a long time, and for those not familiar with the American work ethic.

These employer expectations, especially attendance and attitude, are listed among “the soft skills of employment.” They aren’t always acquired in a classroom or in a one-on-one job-coaching session. They’re best learned through practice—on-the-job training programs that simulate the workplace and require apprentice workers to come on time, every day, drug free, and with a good attitude. Actual performance is the best indicator of future success.

Exploring Your Community’s Resources

Juan Torres, 22, was saddled with a \$6,000 debt. He had registered for a job-training program with the intention of receiving his paralegal certification. The program director promised him a substantial scholarship and a student loan of \$5,000 which he could pay back when he obtained his first job. It sounded like a dream come true, but Juan had not read the fine print on his contract. In order to fulfill his obligation he had to maintain a 97 percent attendance rate. Midway through the first semester his baby daughter required surgery. Juan and his wife spent their days in the hospital. Juan missed six days of school, losing his credits for the semester. He started over during the fall, but then his second-hand car had transmission problems and, again, he faulted on his attendance pledge. Meanwhile, without the job that he had expected to have, his student loan payments came due. Within a few months, he was overwhelmed with debt. No one at the training program helped him question whether or not the promised outcome matched the realities of his life.



Job and Life Skills



Your local job market contains both threats and opportunities for the vulnerable unemployed. Your role will be to familiarize yourself with the community's resources so that you can access them, with the obstacles so that you can get around them, and with the pitfalls so that you can protect the vulnerable from exploitation.

If you are to become an effective advocate for the unemployed, you will want to know how to assist your clients to use community assets appropriately. Take time to investigate the employment-related services in your community—both the profit and nonprofit entities. When you have identified services, agencies, and organizations that you believe to be effective, build relationships with them. Keep individuals in these organizations informed of your goals and progress so that they view you as a collaborator.

Attend Chamber of Commerce meetings and begin to put names and faces to potential employers. Identify the employers located within

fifteen miles of your service area. Find out what kind of jobs are available in these environments. These will be the workplaces that your clients will be able to access. Network with local temporary employment agencies to learn about how they broker jobs with employers and in which areas they specialize. Explore the resources of your local educational institutions. Community colleges often provide relevant training at a minimal cost, and they may be willing to bring their programs to your site.

As you are learning about the resources in your community, don't be overly impressed by high-minded words and glossy flyers. If you really want to understand the services and how they are delivered, ask to tour the facilities. Wherever you explore, take note of the client base. Look for results. When gathering information about agencies and services, keep the following questions in mind:

- Who does the agency say that they serve? Who do they believe that they serve best?
- Is there a community college or a state-funded job training program with whom you can align your services?
- If it is a for-profit agency, how is it financed? What does the client pay?
- If it is a nonprofit organization, what is the source of funding?
- Does the agency entice clients with the promise of a scholarship only to saddle them with high interest loans and future debt?
- Who are your partners in the community likely to be?

Finding Your Niche And Getting Known For What You Do Best

Vanessa Soto was 18 and pregnant when she signed up for an 18-week program to obtain certification as a nurse's aide. She had dropped out of school three years before to spend her days with her gang-oriented boyfriend. She hadn't liked school and didn't know if she could learn. The nurse's aide program appealed to her. It was fast-paced and personal. After 10 weeks at a desk, she was gaining clinical experience at the bedside. As a nurse's aide, Vanessa's common sense, engaging personality, and learning came together and she experienced success for the first time in her life. Several weeks after her baby was born, Vanessa easily found employment and was hired with a starting salary of \$8.50 an hour. She took a second level of training, was hired in the local hospital, and received a \$3.00 hourly increase. Today she is using her bi-lingual skills and medical background to provide case management and coach-



Job and Life Skills

ing to pregnant teens. She's earning \$16.00 an hour and can afford her own apartment.

The nonprofit agency where Vanessa received her nurse's aide training had developed the program because they learned there was an on-going and continuous need for this entry level job and that it led to a career ladder in other medical fields. The agency not only provided the basic training required for state certification but they also learned what skills and values local nursing homes and hospitals were looking for in nurse's aide candidates. They added a home-health component that was highly desirable to many employers and gave special attention to helping bi-lingual students use their language skills for patient care. The agency developed a program that enabled its candidates to stand out from the crowd.

Short term, intense, and highly focused training programs—20 weeks or less—often work best. It's an investment of time that people can make because the payoff is within their grasp.

Employers are often best equipped to identify what skills and competencies are “missing but needed.” By interviewing human resource directors and hiring agents in both large and small organizations you can learn where there are gaps in skills between employer needs and the unskilled worker. You can strengthen your services to both the employer and the client by filling that gap. Questions to consider may include:

- Where are there jobs with potential upward mobility?
- What skills can be acquired through short-term training programs?
- Is there a niche in your job market that is not being filled by another organization?
- Who can you interview to find out what training is “missing but needed” in your community?
- How can you get better at what you already do well?
- How can you strengthen your reputation as a trainer or broker for future employees?



Measuring and Adapting: Did It Fly?

You'll be able to encourage foundations, donors, and government entities to invest in your program if you can deliver what you promise, and evaluation through measurement is the evidence of your success.

Making good decisions about what to measure will depend upon

knowing the difference between outputs and outcomes. Outputs are the services you provide, while outcomes are the measurable changes in your clients that result. The number of students enrolled in a class would be an output, but the number of students who find good jobs and keep them are solid outcomes. Outcomes can be the achievement of your program goals or changes in your clients' attitudes about work or about their future. Your dialogue with a professional evaluation expert can help you decide which results matter the most. For example, don't just decide what the workplace needs; instead, work directly with employers to find out what they want. And you don't have to measure everything. People vote with their feet. If your program is not working, they won't be there.



Job and Life Skills

In addition to evaluating the effectiveness of your program, you can also use measurement to monitor your relationships with employers and collaborators, especially those on whom parts of your program depend. Let them respond anonymously to a survey to find out if they respect your methods, if they want to continue their relationship with you, and if they have suggestions for improving your program or relationship with them.

Be sensitive to the timing of measurement. If your client base is made up of young people who live in pervasively drug-dependent environments and have a poor history in school or with previous jobs, you



might want to start measurement after a client has been in the program for 30 days or so. This will help you avoid completing paperwork for someone who may not be ready. Gather baseline data as soon as a relationship of trust has been built, and give the program adequate time to instill change before collecting follow-up data. It's good to remember that some programs take time to become successful.



The Ripple Effect: Expect it and Encourage it

Elizabeth Bravo, 19 years old and a single mother, found her first job in a convenience store. While Elizabeth was bi-lingual in English and Spanish, her employer spoke a language she did not understand and it was difficult for her to communicate with him. He paid her in cash, changed her hours at whim, and on weekends left her working alone and unprotected until midnight. Although she worked eight to ten-hour shifts, Elizabeth was not allowed breaks. Her employer insisted that she squat down under the counter to eat her hasty lunch. Elizabeth wanted to improve her situation and with the help of a job coach at a community center, she was able to better her skills and to find employment as a full-time receptionist. She was happy to have the better job but was then faced with some new and unfamiliar challenges. Elizabeth didn't understand her rights as a worker and had never been paid formally. Every step of the way, her job coach was in the wings to help her make important decisions.

Many clients who have not worked before are unsophisticated about employment issues. They are often unfamiliar with their rights and will put up with unacceptable working conditions. Typically, they got their first job in an informal manner and may have been afraid to ask questions. Inexperienced workers may never have made a formal job application and they are often unprepared for a pre-employment interview. Even dressed in what they consider to be their "best clothing," they may not match the standard dress code of the workplace. Other clients may come with impediments that need to be dealt with before they can be productive workers. One person may need childcare; another may need to clear up legal issues in order to obtain a valid driver's license.

Working with clients to solve these problems can impact their lives in ways that they may not have anticipated. Those who have not previously worked in a formal workplace environment suddenly have an infrastructure in place to support the success of finding a better

position. They will know how to read and understand a paycheck, to select appropriate benefits, and set up and use a bank account.

A job coach who understands the workplace and what employers look for in an employee plays a significant role in leading clients to grow in this way. An effective coach works with the client every step along the way to:

- Prepare a resume.
- Practice typical interview questions, giving particular attention to how to address issues such as the lack of a high school diploma, lack of previous work experience, or time spent in jail.
- Select appropriate clothing to match the job.
- Make decisions about transportation and childcare.
- Decide how to use and save money appropriately.



Job and Life Skills



Caution

In the field of human services, connecting the unemployed or underemployed to the job market is one of the most empowering services that can be rendered. If this is what you have set out to do, don't be put off by naysayers who will warn you that others have tried what you have in mind and have failed. Even people of good will can offer simplistic solutions to what you know to be complex issues. Don't let yourself be discouraged or distracted. By staying close to the client and connected to community resources, you'll discover what works. You'll make the path by walking.



Summary

Take your inspiration, passion, and focus from the following story: One day a man walking on an isolated beach noticed countless starfish that had been washed up by the tides. Out of their element, they were shriveling and dying. Ahead of him, he saw a boy reaching down and pitching one starfish at a time back into the surf. When the man caught up with the boy, he cautioned, "There are so many starfish, you'll never be able to save them all. What you're doing just won't matter!" With great intentionality, the boy leaned down, picked up yet another starfish and tossed it into the ocean. "It matters to this one," he said and kept to his task.

In connecting one vulnerable person at a time to a productive work life, your role will matter enormously.

RESOURCE LIST

Sosa, L. *The American Dream. How Latinos Can Achieve Success in Business and in Life.* New York: Plume, 1998.

Zambrana, R. E., (Ed.) *Understanding Latino Families: Scholarship, Policy and Practice.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995.

Homeboy Industries: A community-based organization that puts hard-to-place youth to work.

www.homeboy-industries.org

Public Private Ventures: A public policy and program development organization focusing on workforce development.

www.ppv.org

City Skills: A resource that provides resources for the information technology labor market.

www.cityskills.org

United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration

www.doleta.gov

Quintessential Careers: Do's and don'ts about resumes, interviews and job searches

www.quintcareers.com

Youth Jobs: A source of tools and tips for young job seekers

www.youthjobs.ca

Taller San Jose: A community based organization that provides education and job skills to Latino youth.

www.tallersanjose.org

THRIVING BUSINESS DISTRICTS

Boston Main Streets



Population and commercial decline often create a reinforcing disinvestment cycle where perceptions stall new investment.



The Challenge

Neighborhood business districts face the challenge of re-establishing themselves as vibrant centers of community life and commerce. As city residents relocated to suburbs, the economic base for commercial districts declined in number and income. In response, large chains and independent retailers alike, followed their customers to the suburbs, in many cases occupying new shopping malls. Merchants that remain face stiff competition as the shopping options for city residents have grown to include large shopping centers in nearby suburbs, rebuilt downtown districts, and mail order and internet-based firms. Moreover, population and commercial decline often create a reinforcing disinvestment cycle where perceptions stall new investment but the absence of capital prevents physical improvements and new businesses activity needed to reverse these perceptions.



The Invention

A comprehensive revitalization approach to create, build, and sustain healthy neighborhood commercial districts.



The Solution: Getting the Idea to Fly

The desire to improve a neighborhood commercial district can originate in many different places. The first discussions may take place within a merchant association, resident group, preservation organization, community development corporation, or city government, but ultimately the solution will involve all these stakeholders. Wherever it starts, early outreach to the other groups by program organizers is important to gain

By Emily Haber of Boston Main Streets and Karl Seidman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

acceptance of the challenges and participation in the solutions. A start-up organization, however, need not be large and unwieldy—a core group of committed individuals can accomplish tremendous things.

Once you have a small, committed group, start to build your knowledge base. Undertake research to determine who can help you, both inside and outside the neighborhood. Create a list of neighborhood and city stakeholders to enlist in the revitalization effort. Cultivate a champion for your efforts—someone who will strongly advocate for commercial district improvements both within the public and the private sectors. Contact other areas with successful revitalization initiatives and invite them to speak to your group. Or better yet, take a road trip. A visit to an accomplished program will energize your organizing group and most practitioners will be happy to share their accomplishments and challenges with you. Arrange for local papers to cover your exploration by inviting a local reporter along on the road trip, or sharing what you learned upon your return. When the core group has enough information, hold a broadly publicized community meeting where commercial district revitalization efforts are explained.

At the public presentation and in follow-up meetings with stakeholders, seek initial commitments of money, in-kind donations, and volunteer time. Be strategic in recruiting volunteers that represent key stakeholders and bring valuable expertise, such as fundraising, public relations, urban design, and economic development. You can also begin building a project pipeline by asking property owners and merchants if they will improve their storefront if matching funds become available.

Involve key politicians and city officials from the beginning by inviting them to serve on the governance board and program committees and to participate in community meetings. Encourage your mayor or city councilors to speak with their counterparts in cities that have city-supported revitalization programs. When your agenda is set, work with city and state elected officials to secure funding for priority projects, improvements to public services, and vital infrastructure investments. Use leveraging statistics from other commercial district revitalization programs and local pledges for volunteer time, funding, and façade improvements to make the case for city funding and investment. Link neighborhood commitments with city action, for example, by organizing merchants to adopt-a-trash-barrel or flower planter if the city installs them.

A commercial district strategy should focus on a cohesive area to establish it as a “destination.” That does not mean that people



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travel from far and wide to come to the district, but that surrounding residential areas view the commercial district as belonging to their neighborhood. For revitalization to succeed, these residents must play a critical role as program volunteers and in supporting local businesses. When an adjacent residential area does not use the commercial district “because there is nothing there for them,” you will need to educate them to see the possibilities of an improved district and enlist them in realizing this potential.

ABOUT BOSTON MAIN STREETS

Boston Main Streets was established by the City of Boston in 1995 as a public-private partnership. Neighborhood commercial districts are chosen through a competitive application process for Boston Main Streets designation. Once designated, a district forms a nonprofit Main Street organization that receives city financial and technical resources to assist them in realizing local revitalization goals. Boston Main Streets has assisted 21 main street districts. The city maintains a central office with seven full-time staff. Citywide accomplishments since 1995 include:

- opening of 444 net new businesses
- creating 3,057 jobs
- leveraging 6.3 million in private investment for 311 storefront improvement projects
- generating over 97,000 hours of volunteer board and committee members time to improve their districts

The biggest challenge facing Boston Main Streets is long-term sustainability of each neighborhood program. City support for each district was supposed to end after four years, at which point local programs were expected to be able to raise sufficient funds to carry on. While the districts work to expand their capacity to raise funds, the city remains invested in their success because the program has impressive results. The comprehensive approach of Boston Main Streets has led to wide-scale improvements in the physical, economic, and social conditions in the city's historic neighborhood centers of commerce.



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Once the stakeholders are on board, determine how your commercial district revitalization effort will be organized. Here are three possible structures. A stand-alone main street organization is a common model. Developing a new organization allows you to bring together all the stakeholders of a commercial district—the residents, merchants, property owners, and nonprofit organizations—in their own entity to work on revitalizing the commercial district. Historically, resident groups and merchant groups meet in adversarial situations such as liquor licensing hearings or requests for zoning changes. Working together to develop a common vision for the commercial district provides a unique opportunity to build understanding that all players have an equal stake and responsibility in the district’s success. However, the time and hurdles to create, staff, and fund a new organization can delay implementation and weaken momentum from early organizing.

A second option is to establish your main street program within a pre-existing nonprofit organization. This allows you to hit the ground running. You do not have to incorporate a new organization and file for 501(c) (3) status. The resources of the organization are already in place to support the staff that is hired to undertake the commercial district efforts. Existing organizations also may have valuable capacities in real estate or business development and key relationships that can increase the scope and effectiveness of your revitalization initiative.

Finally, if state legislation allows for the establishment of a Business Improvement District (BID), it is worthwhile to explore this model. With a BID, property owners fund revitalization work through special assessments. These funds often support “clean and safe” programs that enhance district cleanliness and reduce crime, but they can finance a tremendous variety of activities, such as marketing, festivals, and infrastructure improvements. A BID allows for a steady, reliable stream of income for your commercial district activities.

Whichever model you choose, hiring a highly effective staff person to run your main street effort is critical. Great main street managers need to be entrepreneurial, highly organized, comfortable with technology (a one-person operation needs to be able to easily access and share information), and possess the ability and desire to work closely with diverse volunteers and stakeholders. A manager’s professional background might include urban planning, small business, marketing, law, and/or nonprofit management. Most importantly, your manager needs to be comfortable being on the street, going door-to-door, meeting and



working with merchants, finding out what they need, and bringing them resources. Once you find the right person, make sure you treat them well. Frequent staff turnover hinders a program's development.

Revitalization begins with knowledge and vision. Communities need to understand current district conditions and opportunities, and then apply this knowledge to formulating a shared vision for change. A careful inspection and inventory of the district's physical and economic conditions is a good place to begin. A physical assessment uses photographs and maps to document abandoned, vacant and blighted properties, vacant commercial spaces, prominent buildings, landmarks and façades that create positive images, and the condition of streets, sidewalks, street furniture (lighting, benches, trashcans, bus stops, etc.), parking areas, and open space. Transportation conditions, such as traffic flow and safety, public transit service, and ease of pedestrian movement, also need to be documented. An economic inventory identifies current economic roles and business clusters by listing the number, location, and square footage of uses by economic category, e.g., restaurants, food stores, social service agencies, etc. Observing which customer groups patronize the district and who does not shop there helps identify the commercial area's core market and opportunities to expand its customer



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base. Based on your inventory, summarize both key strengths and opportunities to build on and priority conditions and sites to change. After documenting existing conditions, create a shared vision for the commercial district through a participatory process that engages diverse stakeholders in reviewing existing conditions, generating ideas and goals for the district, and deliberating on common goals and priorities. Next, convert your vision into an action plan with specific activities that have strong buy-in from stakeholders and cover short-term (three to six months), medium-term (one to two years) and long-term (three to five years) implementation periods. Include visible and achievable short-term projects to build momentum for the revitalization plan by involving people in quickly creating some changes.

Successful revitalization plans tackle three agendas: (1) reducing crime and improving perceived safety; (2) creating an attractive and pedestrian-oriented physical environment; and (3) building a viable economic center. To address public safety, partner with the police department by inviting them to join your governing board and help plan crime prevention initiatives. Conduct a crime prevention audit of the commercial district with the police to identify ways to eliminate opportunities to commit crime, and incorporate these findings into your agenda. Examples might include using design guidelines and façade improvement incentives to remove solid grates that hide criminal activity and broadcast an unsafe image, and advocating to change business and government practices that affect security, such as the licensing and hours for liquor stores.

To transform the physical environment, establish a design vision for buildings and public spaces that enhances your neighborhood's special character while facilitating pedestrian activity and social interaction. Formalize this vision with façade design guidelines and a district-wide plan for streetscape improvements. Encourage property owners, developers, and city agencies to incorporate your design ideas into their agendas. By raising funds for a façade grant program, you will have a financial incentive to motivate property owners to improve their storefronts in line with your design vision.

Economic development initiatives expand the district's consumer market and enhance its business base. By completing a market analysis, you will understand the district's market potential, key customer segments, and feasible business opportunities and be better prepared to formulate effective marketing and business development strategies. The

market analysis also lets you educate the public, merchants, and property owners about the district's market potential and broaden support for your revitalization agenda. Articulate a new positive image for the district, based on special physical, cultural, and economic assets, and promote this image through a sustained marketing campaign. Help retain and grow your existing businesses through brokering services to improve their capacity, promoting peer learning, and organizing cooperative initiatives to reduce their costs and expand their markets. Finally, build relationships with property owners and developers to convince them to remove undesirable uses and lease to desired new businesses. Moreover, become an active advocate in the development process to encourage new development and shape its design and economic uses.

Possible funding sources

- Government grants such as the Federal Community Development Block Grant funds can be applied to commercial district revitalization for districts where 51 percent or more of the households in the district target area are low/moderate income.
- Membership programs targeted to residents and merchants in your area.
- Local utility companies fund main street programs in a number of locations.
- Banks can receive Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) credit for supporting a main street program. All banks located in the district should be expected to support your program. Banks outside of the district that are interested in expanding their small business lending program are also good candidates to approach.
- Foundations are a possible source, particularly for commercial districts in low-income areas and community development corporation (CDC)-sponsored initiatives.
- Mature main street programs often develop fee-generating enterprises, such as managing a parking facility in the district, developing commercial property, and merchandising.



Measuring and Adapting: Did It Fly?

Revitalization programs are dynamic enterprises that need to learn from experience and adjust to new conditions. Through systematically documenting their results, programs generate critical

information for strategic planning and convince key supporters of their effectiveness. Begin by setting measurable goals that track revitalization progress for physical improvements, economic development, and public safety. Improving public safety goals might include reduced crime incidents, eliminating vacant lots that house criminal activity, and improved safety perceptions among district shoppers and employees. Next, formulate a plan to measure progress that details what data are needed, how the data will be collected and analyzed, the necessary computer software and set-up, and the required budget and staffing. Measure progress against the existing conditions documented in the original planning phase and against prior year conditions, and identify which projects and activities contributed to positive results.



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Share your results with many stakeholders. Prepare and mail a concise summary of accomplishments to members, elected officials, funding sources, and community leaders. Use newsletters, press releases, opinion pieces, and news stories to publicize these findings to a larger audience.

Conduct an annual strategic review to apply lessons on program successes and information on new challenges and opportunities from important environmental changes to update your goals, strategies, and work plans. Set aside sufficient time, through several meetings or an extended retreat, for board and staff leadership to discuss this information, agree on its implications, and formulate revised goals and work plans. After board adoption of the revised strategy, explain the changes to program stakeholders and gain their buy-in.



The Ripple Effect: Expect it and Encourage it

Creating thriving commercial districts is critical to the quality of life in our communities. They recycle money locally, harnessing our spending to create income and jobs for our friends and neighbors. Healthy commercial centers foster a strong small business sector that provides local jobs, entrepreneurial opportunities, and funding for community activities. With diverse businesses nearby, residents save time and reduce car trips by obtaining goods and services close to home. Finally, vibrant business districts are community centers that help residents, merchants, and workers get to know and trust each other by nurturing informal socializing and hosting community events. In total, strong business districts provide an antidote to sprawl by making city neighborhoods an attractive living and shopping alternative to suburbs and exurbs.



Caution

Through anticipating common problems, you will avoid key pitfalls along the road to revitalization. One pitfall is applying a comprehensive approach without being strategic. Rather than pursuing many agendas and activities at once, invest your limited resources and political capital in the projects and activities that are most critical to revitalization, promise significant impacts, and will build momentum. Second, don't overlook the need for a shared vision and broad-based buy-in for your agenda. Through undertaking outreach, participatory planning, and consensus-building upfront, you will gain the allies, participation, and support that are essential to successful implementation. Third, don't take awareness for granted; regularly promote your revitalization agenda and accomplishments through all possible channels. Since gentrification may follow successful revitalization, plan ways to manage its negative impacts. These can include strengthening business capacity, expanding nonprofit and local business ownership of commercial real estate, and advocating to include diverse income groups and uses in new development projects.



Summary

Neighborhood commercial centers play an important role in the socio-economic and social fabric of our cities. Business districts that experienced disinvestment over time need our attention to regain their vitality. A healthy, thriving business district provides jobs, allows residents to have some of their basic needs met close to home, combats sprawl, and is a place for neighbors to meet and form social connections. The work of commercial district revitalization is hard and slow, but the payoff is great.

Build your partnerships and develop your champions early and continue to nurture those relationships throughout your efforts. Make sure all the key stakeholders have a place at the table. Develop a shared vision for the district with a work plan that is both comprehensive and strategic. Choose short and long-term projects that will improve public safety, create an attractive pedestrian-oriented area, and foster a dynamic business base. Publicize your efforts through all available channels to build financial and volunteer support. Document existing conditions and record changes as they occur. Finally, acknowledge your hard work and your successes with celebrations and gatherings.

RESOURCE LIST

Publications

- Dane, S. G., (Ed.), *New Directions for Urban Main Streets*. Washington, DC: National Main Street Center, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1988. Case studies of the first urban programs implemented in the 1980s.
- Dane, S. G. *Main Street Success Stories*. Washington, DC: National Main Street Center, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1997. A diverse set of successful local commercial revitalization programs across rural, suburban, and urban communities.
- Houston, L. O. Jr. *BIDS: Business Improvement Districts*. Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute and International Downtown Association, 1997. A detailed review of BID organization and practices, including several case studies.
- Smith, K., Joncas, K., and Parrish B. *Revitalizing Downtown*, Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1991. A comprehensive guide to commercial district revitalization with many practical tools for baseline research and planning projects.
- Seidman, K. F. *Revitalizing Commerce for American Cities: A Practitioner's Guide to Urban Main Streets*, Washington, DC: Fannie Mae Foundation. A detailed guide on implementing neighborhood Main Street programs with a companion volume of seven case studies programs in three cities.



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Web Sites

- Web site for Boston Main Streets including links to web sites for local main street programs:
www.bostonmainstreets.com
- A gateway to the National Main Street Center extensive resources on commercial revitalization:
www.mainstreet.org
- Information on the Local Initiative Support Corporation's Center for Community Revitalization:
www.liscnet.org/whatwedo/programs/ccr
- Web site for the International Downtown Association which is the primary trade association for BIDs:
www.ida-downtown.org
- Web site with materials from the first-ever Urban Main Street Forum held in June 2002, including keynote speeches and notes from practitioner idea exchanges:
www.nmsi.org/forum
- The National Crime Prevention Council:
www.ncpc.org
- A clearinghouse on CPTED hosted by the Washington State University Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture):
www.thecptedpage.wsu.edu

WORKING TOGETHER FOR KIDS

Region Nine Prevention and Healthy Communities Network



*Citizen coalitions
can make the
difference between
a community that
turns the corner
on its troubles and
one that stumbles
from crisis to crisis.*



The Challenge

Across the nation, despite sometimes daunting odds, grassroots coalitions are demonstrating success in increasing the capacity of communities to solve complex problems and fully include all people in local problem solving and decision making. Citizen coalitions can make the difference between a community that turns the corner on its troubles and one that continues to stumble from crisis to crisis (Potapchuk and Crocker, 1999). Citizen engagement leads to better decisions, results, and real community change. A broad-based community coalition with representation from many community sectors is a powerful entity. Citizens can compel local government to listen to them. They can induce their religious organizations to participate in the change process. They know the influential individuals in any subgroup of the community.

Effective coalitions do not just develop overnight, however. Multiple factors contribute to successful coalition building, and multiple factors must also be in place to sustain viable community improvement efforts over time.



The Invention:

A broad-based coalition of community stakeholders that works on crucial local issues.



The Solution: Getting the Idea to Fly

Various theories about coalition building describe what works, what doesn't work, why people frequently don't trust "the system," and why the perspectives of community members are often disregarded by

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those in power. These insights are emphasized in the important works of McKnight (1995) and Potapchuk and Crocker (1999). We have found that our own work in building, sustaining, and evaluating community coalitions aligns with (and has been bolstered by) the insights of these social theorists.

McKnight (1995) posits that a community is more than just a place. It comprises various groups of people who work together on a face-to-face basis in public life, not just in private. Together these varied, often informal groups make up the civic capital of a community. People come together through associations such as the American Legion, a bowling league, a coffee klatch, small decision-making groups, or a block club. They meet in restaurants, beauty parlors, barbershops, bars, stores, and other businesses. They gather for interaction and transaction. However, it is from these associations that most “labeled people” are excluded, including low-income families and people of color, the disadvantaged, and people with disabilities. McKnight suggests that it is these associations into which all people need to be included in order to become active citizens in a democratic society.

Potapchuk and Crocker (1999) developed a framework that explored the elements of civic capital which they describe as the engine that drives a community to overcome barriers, create accountability, manage change, and get things done. They theorized that the difference between a community that turns the corner on its troubles and one that continues to stumble from crisis to crisis is the ability to build strong connections among successes, deep relationships among diverse stakeholders, and a compelling vision for change that drives this shared work. Potapchuk and Crocker’s framework outlines five elements of community capacity that we believe successful community coalitions must nurture:

- **Shared vision:** Developing a vision for a group is not just an exercise or in-group process. Working to define a truly shared vision can inspire and instill hope; it can push people toward new accomplishments; it can create a sense of “oneness.” What is the need that brings this group of community members together? What does the group ultimately want for the community?
- **Inclusion rooted in trust:** True inclusion means bringing together people from all segments of a community who may contribute to—or be impacted by—the vision of the coalition. Diversity of membership



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requires a sincere focus on building trust where trust may have been lacking in the past. Trust-building entails meaningful dialogue regarding the diversity within the group, whether that is race, class, culture, gender, or socio-economic status. Clear (and shared) decision-making processes and open, honest communication are fundamental to building trust within inclusive groups.

- **Public engagement to build political will:** Public opinion can have tremendous influence (positive or negative) over a community coalition's efforts. Consideration must be given to framing the vision and the key message of the group, backing it up with data that substantiates need, and showing the broader public how this vision fits within a community-wide public agenda.

ABOUT REGION NINE PREVENTION AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES NETWORK (PHCN)

PHCN is a coalition of 13 local prevention initiatives across nine rural counties in south central Minnesota. Each partner community works on local issues and they have come together as a regional coalition to work on common issues for the past 13 years. PHCN's mission is "to build healthy communities, promote positive youth development and reduce alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use/abuse." The focus of PHCN includes a holistic view of prevention encompassing the "social fabric" and social justice issues of society and small rural communities. The strength of PHCN is the 13 local prevention coalitions and their activities. For example:

- In 2001, over 20,000 youth contact hours were documented by the coalitions.
- Youth performed over 3,000 hours of community service.
- Volunteers contributed 13,808 hours which, at the \$15.39 per hour Independent Sector identified as the hourly volunteer rate, amounted to \$212,505.
- PHCN evaluation shows "clear evidence that youth are making healthier decisions and communities are increasingly aware of the challenges youth face in Region Nine."



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- **Leadership capacity:** Strong coalitions have strong leadership, whether it is provided by an individual or a group. Sustainable leadership is built through training and technical assistance; coaching; and allowing time for reflection and visioning. Sustainable community coalitions are always grooming new leadership.
- **Organizational infrastructure:** The breadth and depth of a coalition's infrastructure will depend on the nature of the vision, the age and size of the coalition, capacity, and the expectations of participants. Regardless, sustainable coalitions must consider such organizational elements as decision-making processes and the extent to which partnerships within the coalition can contribute to the vision. Special consideration should be given to the value of public-private partnerships and the importance of including catalytic 'spark plug' organizations as well as bridge-building organizations.

Over the past several years we have found that our work with community coalitions focused on reducing drug use among adolescents aligns with these theories and shares many of the same strategies. As part of our research efforts we distilled the following critical components of coalition building from lived experiences:

- **Be welcoming of all who want to help.** As McKnight points out, resolving the most intractable community problems will require the collective capacities of all sectors of a community. Too often we seek to "work on" or "work for" a targeted segment of the population when we really need to be "working with." Building the trust that this requires takes time, but it's worth the wait. Nothing else of enduring value can grow until the seeds of trust have been sown. In some communities this takes a year; in some communities it can take as long as ten years.
- **Start where you are.** Although some may want to work on a specific issue, if another issue captures the burning passion of the group and it, too, relates to the vision, start there.
- **Keep your eyes on the prize.** Stay mission-focused. Many differences have the potential to divide people, but if you're all ultimately focused on the same mission, it's worth taking the time to muddle through the difficulties to get to the finish line.
- **Nurture effective leadership.** Effective coalitions plan for leadership stability and transition. One strategy of effective leadership is co-chairs or a vice-chair who successively become chair. Take a very broad view of

who or what constitutes (or could constitute) community leadership. In some communities, churches may offer leadership; in others it may be a neighborhood grocer or librarian, a group of matriarchs, or the guys at the coffee shop. Nurture your leaders and they will surprise even themselves.

- **Consider organizational structure** Many coalitions begin informally—people passionate about an issue begin to meet to work on solutions. Often, these groups remain informal for years, operating under the umbrella of a larger organization that may serve as a fiscal agent. Over time, if the coalition is to remain active, it is a good idea to formalize the structure, either as a part of the umbrella organization or as a freestanding nonprofit in the community. Nonprofit status is governed by the Internal Revenue Service and requires a \$500 filing fee. The benefits of incorporating as a nonprofit include stability over time and limited liability for the people managing and governing the organization. Gaining nonprofit status requires establishing a formal board of directors, articles of incorporation, bylaws, and registration with both the Secretary of State and the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Two national organizations that can provide helpful information about establishing a nonprofit are Independent Sector (www.independentsector.org) and Board Source (www.boardsource.org).



- **Understand the value of taking time to get it right.** Much of coalition work is about communication and information sharing. This takes a lot of time and increases as the coalition grows and more people are involved. The role of sharing information is crucial. It is easy to underestimate the amount of time communication in a coalition will demand.
- **Recognize the need for qualified staff.** When a coalition grows in size and capacity, its continued work may best be facilitated by adding qualified, paid staff with expertise in the issue area and community action. Depending, of course, on the size of the coalition and availability of funding, we've found that a core staff of two-and-a-half to three people seems to work well: a director or coordinator, a community organizer or outreach worker, and at least a part-time administrative support staff member. Look for staff with good facilitation skills, who listen, and who can develop leadership in others. Remember that volunteers provide their time and expertise but staff support may be required to maintain stability and keep the ball rolling over a sustained period.
- **Celebrate and have fun.** Even when progress seems slow to nonexistent, seek out "small wins" (and sometimes they may be really small, but tiny progress is still better than none at all!). Use small wins to introduce play and celebration into the work—it energizes people.
- **Be humble; be real.** In community work, some people may be impressed with professional jargon and outward displays of expertise, but it rarely helps others find their own voice or leadership capacity. Further, professionalizing community matters can serve to exclude population sub-groups that have most commonly been marginalized in our communities (e.g., low-income families, new immigrants, people with disabilities).



Measuring and Adapting: Did It Fly?

Evaluating, re-examining, and adapting are key elements of strong community coalitions. Experience tells us that the needs, assets, and priorities of communities shift, and coalitions must be prepared to adjust accordingly. Establishing effective and ongoing evaluation practices is an essential component of maintaining a coalition's vitality. Doing so creates an organizational culture of learning and growing.

Jacobs (1988) proposed a five-tiered approach to thinking about program evaluation that remains a helpful tool for community coalitions today as they seek to embed evaluation practices into ongoing

operations. Table One outlines Jacobs' evaluation levels and explains the evolution from needs assessment and program definition through measuring accountability and ultimately articulating long-term community impact.

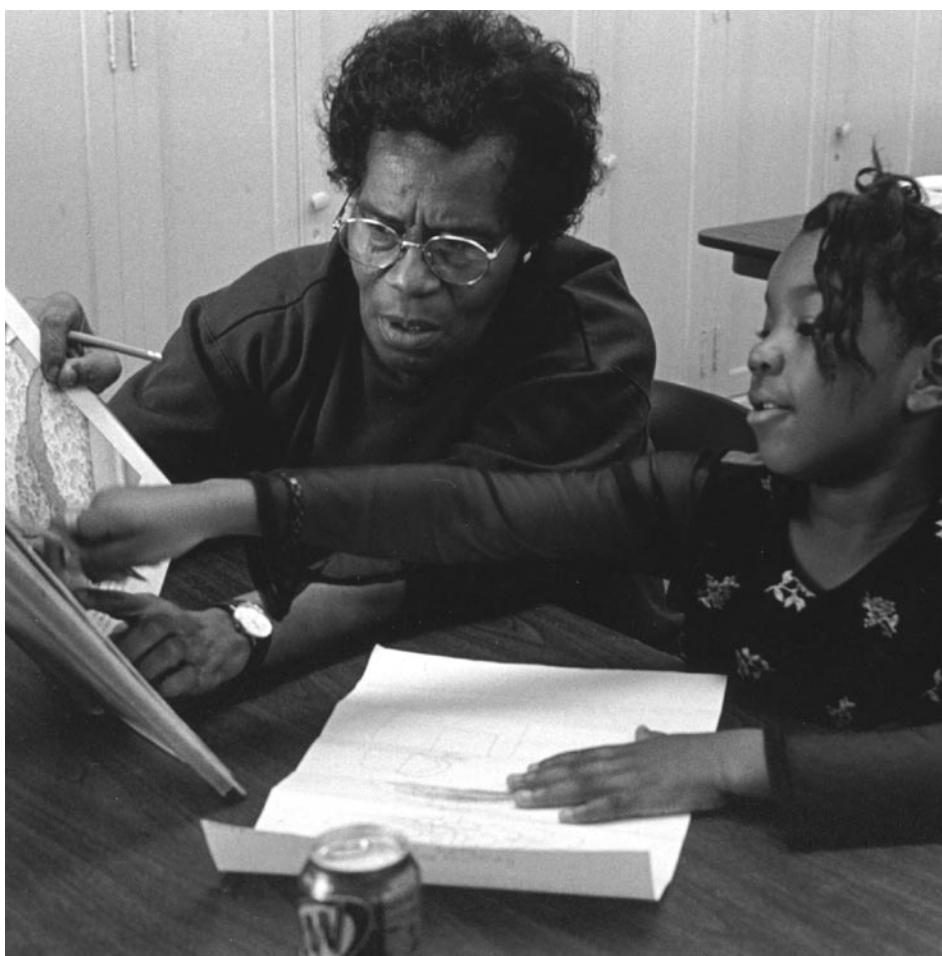
TABLE ONE: A FIVE-TIERED APPROACH TO PROGRAM EVALUATION

Tier	Purpose	Tasks
TIER 1: PROGRAM DEFINITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the needs of the community relative to the focus/vision of the coalition. • To justify proposed coalition efforts. • To define proposed coalition actions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with stakeholders to assess community needs and assets. • Review pertinent literature/experience base. • Describe the program's vision, mission, goals, objectives, and characteristics.
TIER 2: ACCOUNTABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine if coalition activities serve or support those they were intended to serve in the manner proposed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all stakeholders • Document participation, activities, and implementation.
TIER 3: UNDERSTANDING AND REFINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve coalition efforts by providing program information to program staff, participants, and other stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather program satisfaction information. • Examine "fit" between information collected in Tiers 1 and 2. • Examine process-related information and lessons learned. • Identify program strengths and weaknesses.
TIER 4: PROGRESS TOWARD OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To document coalition effectiveness and outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select outcome indicators and identify measures that are considered valid by program stakeholders. • Decide on design and data analysis. • Report findings to immediate stakeholders and the broader public
TIER 5: PROGRAM IMPACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To demonstrate long-term improvements in quality of life for those involved. • To demonstrate program sustainability. • To suggest coalition models/strategies worthy of replication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan early to document long-term impact. • Provide evidence of sustainability. • Identify and document program components worthy of replication. • Distribute findings of impact

Source: Jacobs, F.H. (1988). The Five-Tiered Approach to Evaluation: Context and Implementation. In H. Weiss and F. Jacobs (Eds.), *Evaluating Family Programs*. NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988.



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The Ripple Effect: Expect it and Encourage it

As coalition members work on an issue, other issues will surface and create connected action. Expect this; it is a good thing. For example, as we worked on rural substance abuse issues, concerns about Latino youth dropping out of school surfaced. In response to this, part of the coalition worked on developing a culturally specific leadership development program for Latino youth. A strong prevention message was incorporated into the leadership program. In this way, the prevention work continued and reached new populations.

Other ripples may be started by leaders trained within the coalition. In one case, a woman who went through leadership training provided by the lead agency went on to develop an organization to prevent youth suicide. In the first two years the program operated, Department of Health statistics indicate youth suicides in the area dropped 61 percent. Several other coalition participants have gone on to run for elected office at the local and state level. They carry the messages of prevention they've learned with them.



Caution

Coalition work is rewarding but difficult! Both research and experience tell us that successful coalitions manage the following process issues well. When these areas are neglected, coalitions falter.

- **Respect people.** Everyone has a valuable role and something to contribute. Recognize that, and make sure others recognize it as well. The true heroes in communities are the volunteers. They often use their own resources, however limited, as part of their volunteer contribution. They give of their hands, their hearts, and their knowledge. Citizen volunteers play many roles. They serve as topical experts, mentors, organizers, connectors, resource developers, fundraisers, information brokers, policy makers, and evaluators. These are the experts on their community; it pays to listen to them.
- **Share information openly.** Information is a tool that can effectively mobilize whole groups of people and instigate action. It can also cause harm. When important information is shared selectively, it has the potential to create factions and marginalize individuals. In fact, withholding or misrepresenting information forms the basis for much of the mistrust existing in communities today while accurate information that is widely shared becomes a tool for change.
- **Be inclusive.** One danger in building a strong collaborative group with a high level of trust is that it runs the risk of becoming a closed system or “club.” Communities change and so should the groups (formal and informal) which mobilize to meet the needs of the community. This infusion of new energy will necessitate an ongoing focus on trust building, celebration, sharing of information, etc. The process is cyclical, not linear.
- **Acknowledge the cyclical evolution of coalitions.** Coalitions, like anything else, have their ups and downs. At times, any given coalition looks like nothing can stop it. At other times, that same coalition may look like nothing can get it going again. Know this and persist through these times.

Coalition work follows the team development process of forming, storming, norming, and performing. Forming occurs as members are getting together and is usually characterized by extreme politeness. It's followed by storming as passion builds and people actively advocate for their perspective. Emotions can be heated and meetings may become tense during this time. Norming is underway when the group begins

to drop individual agendas to work together for the common good (remaining mission-focused is crucial during this time). The coalition will know it is performing when it hits its stride and looks like nothing can stop it. Members are working closely together, there is momentum in the community, and results are evident. As members come and go, this process may repeat itself. If (or when) a coalition that had been performing well suddenly finds itself dropped back to the forming stages, it is not the end of the world. It may simply signal an influx of new membership or new emerging leadership.



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Summary

There is a process to a coalition's work. First, awareness of the target issue must be raised through information sharing, data, and events like neighborhood or town meetings. Use of media and one-to-one conversations are helpful at this point. Second, small projects with built-in success create capacity and momentum. These lead to larger projects with more people involved and more impact. Finally, celebration, evaluation, and feedback help members know what is working and drive the refinement of strategies. Members will come and go according to the coalition focus, their own personal and family lives, etc. Change can be difficult, but it can also be the lifeblood of the coalition.

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WHAT DO CIVIC INVENTORS DO?

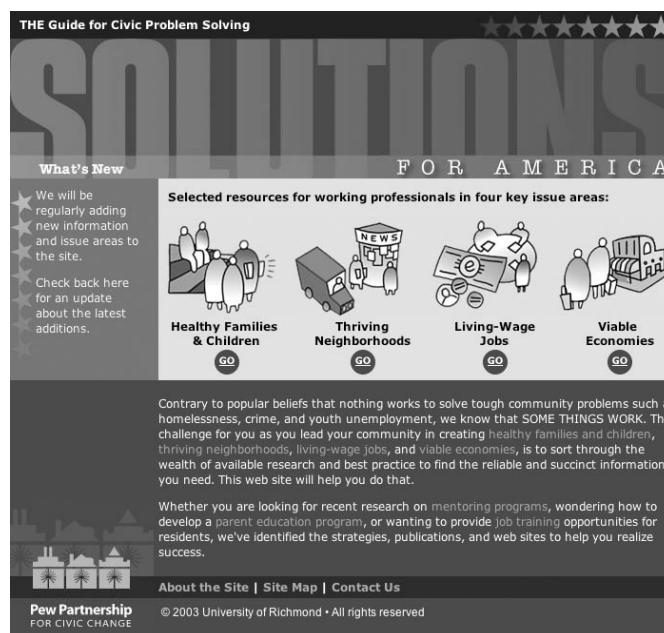
Civic inventions improve the way a community does its work. As we saw in these eight examples, sometimes it is a process like the rural leadership project and sometimes it is actually a “thing” like Dental Health for Arlington. In all cases, civic inventions are better mousetraps that allow citizens to tackle critical issues—and win. Ultimately, inventing is about change.

All inventions start with a knowledge of what’s already out there. They are built on the hard work and tested experience of others. The essential keys to the inventing process are to assimilate the pieces and parts of earlier success, apply them to other situations, *and* to never give up. As these writers illustrated, there are always caution signs and setbacks. Be ready for them but not stymied by them. As Thomas Edison once said, “I have not failed, I have just found 10,000 things that won’t work.”

There are no cookie cutter approaches to community success and change. Each community has to invent the best way to work based on its culture and history and the information and practice at hand. However, we know from these examples and hundreds more, that community success ultimately rests on the ability to invent the structure, process, and leadership needed to make long-term change. So what do civic inventors do? They believe in the possible, they take action, and they never give up. Always has been, always will be.

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