The Role of Leadership in Place Based Initiatives

Prepared for The California Endowment by the Leadership Learning Community

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Background

The Leadership Learning Community is a national organization that is transforming the way in which leadership development work is conceived, conducted and evaluated. LLC has been working closely with leadership programs and funders trying to achieve changes that have a measureable and significant impact on the lives and well being of people in targeted communities. LLC will be harvesting its work with these innovators to shed some light on opportunities to support leadership in place based work.

Background on this Scan

A number of foundations have dedicated significant resources to place based initiatives that seek to support partnerships that link organizations and residents of targeted communities in aligning their work, learning together, and implementing creative strategies to improve their communities. Leadership is a critical element in these initiatives. The California Endowment has a strong interest in place based work to increase the health of Californians and commissioned LLC to learn from leadership strategies in place based initiatives.

Methodology

LLC reviewed leadership strategies connected to place- based initiatives in California and nationally using online research, meetings with key staff and analysis of evaluation findings and pertinent program materials. These resources were used to identify key lessons and best practices in youth development and to provide a framework for assessing local providers. LLC also convened a meeting of 25 well recognized leadership evaluators and place-based funders to learn from experience about how to increase the scale and impact of place based leadership work. The scan focuses heavily on leadership programs in California because TCE is a California funder. There are a number of excellent leadership programs that could be resources to place based initiatives around the country that were not reviewed simply because of this focus.

Sources are all listed in the attached appendix. For the purpose of this scan, LLC found the work of the following place-based initiatives richest in lessons for the BHC work: Annie E. Casey's Leadership in Action Program and their Making Connections Initiative; Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota's Growing up Healthy Initiative; Lawrence Community Works; Kellogg Leaders for Community Change; ELIAS and other multi-stakeholder initiatives using Theory U; PolicyLink Green Impact Zone work in Kansas; Northwest Area Foundation's Horizons Leadership Initiative focused on poverty reduction; Kansas Health Leadership Initiative; Robert Wood Johnson's Ladder to Leadership (which encourages participants to initiate cross- organizational/sector projects in targeted communities); the Kellogg Foundation's Place Matters initiative and the California Conversion Partnership.

Lessons Learned about Leadership in Place-Based Initiatives

A lot can be learned from the experiences of ambitious place based initiatives and their approaches to leadership strategies. Lessons emerge in a couple of leadership areas:

Whose leadership should be supported in a successful place-based initiative?

Multiple stakeholders representing different organizations and sectors: A focus on place begins to address the problems of fragmentation that have kept the non-profit sector fragmented and limited in its ability to systemically address the host of issues that interact to compromise the quality of life in many neighborhoods. Some efforts like the AIDS/HIV multi-stakeholder initiative in Washington, DC which is implementing the Theory U process, have taken on a systems approach and believe that they will not be able to tackle this problem without bringing all the different parts of the system, e.g. government, non-profits, philanthropy, faith-based organizations, and activists into the problem solving process together. The Leadership in Action Program (LAP) sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation also recognizes the need to bring together city government, school officials, non-profits, parent organizations and investors in order to coordinate efforts to increase school readiness measures.

Both of these initiatives have looked more deeply at whether these representatives need to hold positions of authority within their organizations. The Theory U practitioners found when they launched a multi-stakeholder initiative around achieving the Millennium Development Goals for childhood nutrition in India that their initial group of senior level participants did not have the time needed to follow through on the process for developing collective action plans. LAP works with "leaders in the middle" to claim and use their influence from where they are situated within their organizations. They have had a good deal of success with participants discovering how to leverage and coordinate the resources of their organizations.

Community engagement: Across the board, all initiatives recognize the importance of community involvement. They all share a philosophy that anyone can exercise leadership, whether in their family, school, neighborhood or city governance. There is also a core understanding that communities are diverse in their ethnic/racial makeup, age, gender, sexual preference, religion, etc. and that this diversity needs to be fully represented when engaging a community in a place-based initiative. How to achieve community involvement varies in focus including:

- Traditional community organizing strategies
- Popular education approaches, e.g. the "study circles" that were part of the Northwest Area Foundation's statewide poverty reduction initiative and Horizon's leadership program
- Network approaches to build social connectivity in community that are integral to the Lawrence Community Works strategy

- Resident engagement in Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections Initiative.

All of these approaches recognize the importance of tapping a community's wisdom and resources in generating sustainable solutions.

The challenge highlighted by the experience of a number of initiatives is one of sustaining the involvement of community for the long haul. The issue of compensating community participants has been explored in a number of initiatives. It was also a complex issue for Making Connections where stipends were used to compensate people who were not participating on work time. This had both an upside and downside. On the downside this is not an easily sustained strategy and can obscure deeper motivations for taking up leadership if it is used as an incentive for people not already involved. There is concern about resources being used in ways that privilege some participants over others. On the other hand, many volunteers are not compensated for involvement that takes place as part of their job and become financially burdened by the additional transportation and child care costs associated with participation.

Resident and youth leadership are often combined under community leadership or engagement strategies. There are some distinct characteristics of successful approaches to developing youth that have been addressed in a separate section of this report to give appropriate attention to youth development.

What leadership competencies are important in achieving place-based results and how are they supported?

Asset Based Approaches: Before talking about curriculum, it's important to acknowledge that there are often strong reactions to heavily skills based leadership curriculum that can be perceived as a remedy to some deficit in a community's leadership. Leadership participants want to believe that they are an asset for tackling problems in their community and not the problem that needs fixing. This is not to say that communities won't identify skills they would like to develop or benefit from frameworks that give deep meaning to their experiences. For example, in work with youth and community activists, both the Research Center for Leadership in Action and the Philanthropic Racial Equity Initiative in joint research with *mosaic* found that it is important to engage leadership program participants in making meaning of their life experiences. Life experiences are assets in building leadership capacity in community as participants come to understand how their personal experiences are shaped by larger systems of oppression that are manifested in their lives and the experience of others in their community. What is important is who is deciding what skills or resources are needed. As partners and community are convened around their work on achieving health outcomes, it can be useful for those in leadership to have access to resources to meet specific training needs they are identifying that cannot be met within the group, e.g. learning about communication through social media channels, learning about policy advocacy, etc.

Inner work: Most leadership programs that are supporting complex collaborative efforts recognize that 'personal stuff', our unconscious or default behaviors, can sometimes create the greatest obstacles to successful group action. Many leadership programs acknowledge the importance of creating a safe space where participants can reflect on and work with issues like fear, insecurity, competitiveness, a desire for recognition and all of the manifestations of being human. This work helps groups to understand how a culture of individualism gets in the way of collaborative work. The opportunity for deep personal work could benefit all of those engaged in leadership within a place-based initiative, e.g. the coordinators, the organizational partners, the funders, the community members and young people.

This report will also highlight strategies that take a more networked approach to community engagement. Leadership in networks calls for a level of self-awareness and facilitative style not attributed to traditional directive individual styled leadership.

> *The leader has to genuinely participate in the environment in order to deploy herself appropriately. The challenges of this way of being are profound, and those challenges start with a fundamental reflection about who you are as a person and how you move through the world: how you exhibit fear, react to change, deal with letting go of power and ego. How you listen and observe and the keenness of your instincts for both conceptualizing and synthesizing. How you hold onto or let go of strongly held convictions about what is right and what will work. All of these things are of course rooted in the essence of who we are as people.* (Traynor 2009)

Rockwood focuses heavily on the 'inner work' of leadership using 360 tools to help participants learn about themselves from the perspectives of others. As participants of leadership programs are provided with down time or time away from daily activities, they have opportunities to clarify their personal values and deepen their commitment to their work. Rockwood has offered this program for funders who have benefited from the opportunity to be reflective about the power dynamics inherent in their roles that sometimes challenge authentic relationships. LeaderSpring has found that these opportunities for reflection and renewal increase the sustainability of non-profit leaders.

Explicit race, culture, and power analysis: The Leadership in Action Program (LAP) believes that the ability to understand and talk openly about the impact of class, race and power is a key competency for helping groups to work effectively on common goals. With a strong focus on place comes a history of racial, ethnic and class divisions. The Kellogg Leaders for Community Change (KLCC) shared a story about a video project that became a source of great tension over its depiction of different ethnic groups in Queens City, NY. Through the leadership program, that community was able to use this conflict to surface and work through a legacy of ethnic tensions.

PolicyLink, in their place-based initiative in Kansas with the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), focuses on addressing disparities. The Growing Up Healthy Initiative sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation (BCBS), is now incorporating in their leadership program a strong focus on social determinants of health. Grantees are supported to engage in collaborative work to improve health

outcomes for children in the state. The Central Valley Health Policy Institute has a curriculum that could shape a community-driven, popular education campaign on why place has a significant impact on one's health. Frameworks like this can help to deepen community dialogue on issues that have divided the community in the past. The California Endowment's training session on structural racism with john powell helps those doing place based work to develop a common framework and way of talking about the impact of race, class and power on health outcomes. A number of leadership program providers profiled make this an explicit part of their program, e.g. LeaderSpring has incorporated an oppression framework into their program training. The Central Valley Health Policy Institute's Health Leadership Program offers a clear analysis of the impact of race and class on health outcomes in the Central Valley.

Leadership Development for Interethnic Relations (LDIR) has a history of engaging diverse communities in effective conversations on race, culture and power. They have a curriculum that helps participants to understand a system of opportunity structures that create those who are privileged and those who are oppressed. In the context of the program, they also work with participants to have the courage to speak truth to power in acts of resistance that can bring about systemic change.

The Kellogg Leaders for Community Change (KLCC) program offers a final word on power. Participants of their program reacting to the language of 'disempowerment' felt it was important to reframe power, especially the power that a community can claim for itself.

Boundary Crossing: Boundary Crossing has been recognized as a key leadership competency and strategy by TCE and the KLCC program. TCE has worked closely with LDIR to develop a curriculum for supporting boundary crossing capacity. The language of boundary crossing first emerged in response to the civil unrest in Los Angeles and in recognition of the need to build relationships across traditional divisions of race. The program grew to address other forms of oppression that divide us: class, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status. The language of intersectionality or interdependence has become popular in the social justice movement for talking about the need to recognize shared experiences of oppression and common interests based on an analysis of power. Interdependence sees the links that cross work on different issues and lays a foundation for connecting work across issues and silos.

KLCC also emphasizes the importance of boundary crossing in any community mobilization. They pay a great deal of attention to how to create a space that is conducive to helping people with diverse experiences and perspectives to open up to one another by using storytelling, dialogue and reflection to create a common ground for embracing difference. The language of boundary crossing has been adopted by some to refer to organizational, issue and sector boundaries. Many with a social justice perspective express concern that this dilutes the power analysis related to boundaries of class, race and other 'isms'. For the purpose of this report we address the need to work across organizational and sector boundaries as the collaborative, multi-sector work that brings people and organizations from different issues and sectors together.

Use of Data Analysis and Problem Observation: A number of programs have incorporated accessing and using data as an important competency for groups to more fully understand a problem they are investigating and to measure their progress in tackling that problem. This is a strong part of the LAP program which is focused on achieving a quantifiable result in one measurement cycle. Use of data is integrated into the leadership process. Groups like the Data Center in Oakland offer trainings on the use of data with a community empowerment perspective. Programs with a specific policy focus are using data and make data collection and analysis part of leadership program work. PolicyLink partnered with a local university to provide data to leaders in their Green Impact Zone work in Kansas.

The Theory U process has a very strong 'listening' component which supports participants in seeking new data in their problem analysis process. They introduce a listening model that helps participants move beyond a simple confirming/disconfirming approach to one of listening to multiple perspectives with a new level of openness that helps participants to build out a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of what they are dealing with, be it HIV/AIDS or child malnutrition. In their statewide initiative, the Kansas Health Leadership Institute talks about the need for those in leadership to question and test assumptions. The assumption is that we limit our success by being too quick to rush to solutions with familiar diagnoses and remedies without taking the time to seek out data needed to fully understand and make progress on a problem.

Advocacy and Systems Capacity: PolicyLink in their seminal report, "Leadership for Policy Change" (Marsh, Daniel, and Putman 2003), identified the need to provide opportunities for poor people and people of color to influence policies that shape their lives. They acknowledged that leadership in these communities often lacks access to training and experiences that would enable them to develop these skills. Leadership programs provide an opportunity to bring these skills, often associated with systemic and enduring change, to communities. Many leadership programs in place-based initiatives include an advocacy/policy training component or have this as one of the goals, such as PolicyLink's work in the Green Impact Zone, the Kansas Health Leadership Center, the Kellogg Foundation's Place Matters initiative, and the National Community Leadership Development Institute's (NCDI) work with the Skillman Foundation in Detroit.

This last example of NCDI's work is important because they focused on how to help communities understand the mortgage crisis and determine potential advocacy and policy interventions. Many of the initiatives that focus on developing policy skills are using inter-organizational, multi-stakeholder partnership approaches. Less seems to be understood about how to develop the capacity of community members to influence policy. The Horizon's programs found through their study circles on poverty, organized in partnership with Everyday Democracy, that many participants from more than 150 communities throughout the region said that this was the first time they thought about, much less discussed poverty. Communities were energized through this process to create action plans, but they were often not clear about what actions would change the system that is producing poverty.

Many leadership strategies trying to scale change in a place-based approach also felt it was important to introduce systems thinking as an important capacity for knowing how to intervene in a system. The Kansas Health Leadership Institute, LAP, the Theory U practitioners and Policylink all bring a systems perspective to their work. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota has also been looking at how to change systems. Leadership programs in the environmental field, e.g. the Sustainability Institute and LEAD international have developed popular systems thinking curriculum, often games-based and fun, that could be adopted in other fields and used by communities.

How is leadership as a collective process fostered to support collaborative action in a place- based strategy?

Alignment: PolicyLink in their work in the Kansas Green Impact Zone focuses on the need to bring regional and municipal plans, non-profit agencies and communities into alignment around the needs of the community. Two components critical to developing alignment are shared purpose and values. The Kansas Health Leadership Institute has developed exercises for surfacing shared purpose as a cornerstone for effective collaboration. The LAP programs work with groups to translate a shared sense of urgency around a community need into actions that are highly aligned with each other to produce a community result. The KLCC program does a values exercise to help a group lift up shared values and increase group motivation to invest their hearts in shared work. An important and less talked about dimension of the collective leadership process is decision making: how a group will decide upon its actions and make course corrections when needed. There can be strong reaction to the idea of collective leadership because people often wrongly assume that the process bogs groups down in endless discussion and prevents action.

Results Driven: The LAP program has developed and tested a hypothesis that having a clear focus on an achievable and measureable result that has some sense of urgency is a critical condition for helping a group to align its efforts for action. Of course, the strong assumption is that the desire for results will foster a strong commitment to action. This is why LAP emphasizes the importance of working on issues that really matter. LAP uses data and, in fact, engages participants in learning to use data to understand their progress and modify plans. Results may be a specific outcome that program investors and staff are engaging a community around, such as increasing the number of children entering school ready to learn, or results may take the form of focusing on a problem and prototyping potential solutions. The Horizon's program found that their focus on poverty reduction was so big that it was hard for many action teams to develop action plans that were reducing as opposed to ameliorating the impact of poverty. Only half of the groups had measurable targets or benchmarks.

Action Learning: The Kansas Health Leadership Institute refers to leadership as an experimental and improvisational art, stressing that you cannot know what interventions will work until you try them. Action learning is built into the community projects component of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Ladder to Leadership program. Participants express a strong commitment to action and move in continuous cycles of

reflection, action and reflection. The LAP program builds learning into their program with participants reporting on what was attempted and with what result so that they can refine and coordinate their individual and collective work to stay on track with their specific goal of improving school readiness or the successful reintegration of ex-offenders. The Theory U emphasizes creative problem solving and encourages groups to prototype a number of new solutions as a methodology for finding out what works. There is an expectation that many experiments will fail as part of the process of moving a group closer to the breakthroughs. The expectation of, and tolerance for failure as a source of learning and part of the creative process needs to be more consciously cultivated in the non-profit sector and as part of place-based work.

A learning community orientation has become an increasingly important part of the cohort experience of many place-based leadership approaches. Programs like LeaderSpring talk about the importance of honoring the wisdom in the room. In fact, investing in creating a learning community environment increases the sustainability of leadership programs because relationships will be sustained beyond formal program interventions when they bring social and practical learning value to participants.

How are investments in building leadership capacity leveraged?

Network Strategy: A number of statewide leadership programs that have a regional concentration (though not specifically a place-based focus) have come to appreciate the importance of connecting the graduates of their programs for ongoing support, learning and collaborative action. John Capitman from the Central Valley's Health Leadership Program has thought broadly about how the graduates of his program could serve as a leadership core reaching out to connect other leaders in the region to work on policy issues. The Ideal Program in the Central Valley has already supported at least one BCH participant and has an active alumni network that promotes graduates running for office and serving on boards. LeaderSpring has invested in catalyzing its alumni network over the past several years. There is increased opportunity for building momentum in a place-based initiative where leadership program graduates have a shared passion around improving health outcomes. The Growing Up Healthy Initiative in BCBS is building the network of leadership program graduates, grantees and other stakeholders through annual awards gatherings.

Social Media: A number of place-based strategies are using social networking sites to increase connectivity, learning and collaboration among multiple participants (funders, grantees, leadership program participants, evaluators, etc.). The Community Leadership Program launched by the Hewlett Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the James Irvine Foundation have created a site to stimulate learning. They are seeding the use of the site with webinars and learning partners who post questions to catalyze discussion. The funding partners were concerned about requiring grantees to learn and use a new site so communications are not all being funneled through the site. This is an area of intense learning for the field

Leveraging Existing Resources: Making Connections, PolicyLink's Green Impact Zone work, and the Partnership Convergence which all pursued comprehensive place-based

results saw the need to leverage resources from other potential investors. Most of the examples were leveraging financial or in-kind resources.

Conclusion:

Place based initiatives seek to overcome fragmentation by focusing and integrating resources to support comprehensive community change. For all who are interested in scaling our leadership work we have much to learn from these efforts and hope that you will find the lessons produced in this scan a challenge and source of inspiration.

Appendix

Case Study 1: Lawrence Community Works

"A social network approach to results focuses on changing business as usual. It assumes that the process we use to get to results matters as much as achieving results. It assumes that how residents view themselves and their ability to take advantage of an opportunity matters. And it assumes that how providers view residents and their abilities matters." Audrey Jordan (Saasta 2006)

A new way of thinking about problems and solutions in the social sector is underway. While networks have existed for a long time, their application to the social sector is more palpable than ever before. Many organizations and groups in the sector are experimenting with network-centric approaches to tackle the issues of communities and neighborhoods across the nation. While there is still much to learn, these experiments are yielding interesting insights about how thinking in network terms, and putting the communities at the forefront, could generate tangible results. Two prominent examples of this approach are Lawrence CommunityWorks, led by community organizer Bill Traynor, and Making Connections, by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW) is a nonprofit community development corporation working to transform and revitalize the physical, economic, and social landscape of Lawrence, Massachusetts. LCW's goal is to create a new *"environment of connectivity"* where residents can more easily connect to information, opportunity and each other. Their belief is that if thousands of residents are induced to "get back in the game" of working together and taking leadership roles in Lawrence, they can truly revitalize the City. (LCW website)

Making Connections is a ten-year initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (1999-2009) that focused on improving the lives and prospects of families and children in 10 of America's toughest neighborhoods. Making Connections worked to increase family income and assets, ensure that young children have what they need to do well in school, and promote strong resident leadership, civic participation, social networks, and community mobilization.

This document explores some of the key characteristics of a network strategy, an overview of challenges, and some of the results that have been generated by these two initiatives.

Leadership: Weaving the Network

As networks become more and more important, so does the need to shift how we think about leadership. According to a new report by the Monitor Institute, "old models of hierarchical, heroic leadership work well in an organizational context but aren't as good a fit for a more networked environment." (Fulton et al. n.d.)

Leadership in a network environment is focused on a person's or a group's ability to establish meaningful connections – not on their ability to be facilitators or be the public face of the network. Connecting is defined in terms of weaving the network, which is one of the most important roles and functions of those in the network. Over time, more and more members are trained to be 'weavers' and exercise their own leadership within the network.

The leader has to genuinely participate in the environment in order to deploy herself appropriately. The challenges of this way of being are profound, and those challenges start with a fundamental reflection about who you are as a person and how you move through the world: how you exhibit fear, react to change, deal with letting go of power and ego. How you listen and observe and the keenness of your instincts for both conceptualizing and synthesizing. How you hold onto or let go of strongly held convictions about what is right and what will work. All of these things are of course rooted in the essence of who we are as people. (Traynor 2009)

Another example of an organization that is leveraging a network approach is the Barr Foundation. The foundation seeks to improve the after-school programming for youth in the Boston area. One of their key strategies is to use network weavers "to build lasting connections among youth service providers as a way to coordinate effort and drive long-term impact." (Fulton et al. n.d.)

Focus on Openness

Networks place a strong emphasis on creating multiple access points through which people in the community can enter the network. This allows members to enter the network at the level they desire, and have the flexibility to change their level of involvement over time. It also offers an opportunity for more seasoned members to welcome and train new members into the network.

For instance, LCW is open to everyone who lives or works in Lawrence. "In LCW, any project, program, or activity is a door into the network. Regardless of how members enter, information about all other network choices is made available, and participants are actively encouraged to take advantage of all the network has to offer." (Bailey 2006)

Driven by Demand: Community Members are "Drivers of Change"

The current model being used by most foundations and nonprofits across the country is that of 'delivery' or supply model. In essence, organizations deliver services to a community in order to improve a specific area or the community as a whole. This model is problematic because in most cases, organizations do not fully understand the challenges and opportunities facing a given community. Also, this model is "inherently top-down because key decisions are made by the suppliers, not the consumers, and the

nonprofit agencies are seen largely as conduits through which resources pass, rather than vehicles through which local residents come together to solve problems." (Kriesberg 2010)

A much more effective model is the demand-driven model. Based on this model "neighborhoods act like regular consumers in the marketplace, obtaining the services and programs they need to create the type of neighborhood they want." (Kriesberg 2010) According to Traynor, "(At LWC) we try to resource the demand environment in many different ways so that we can improve on resourcing real-life opportunities rather than concepts and ideas that we or funders devise." (Traynor 2009)

Residents themselves, along with their allies, must be the drivers of change: they have to own it, demand it and work for it. When residents enjoy strong, positive social networks; are trained and supported to lead; and are mobilized to reach for results on behalf of their families and communities, they possess the capacity to raise their voices and make authentic demands for change. (Ahsan 2008)

Focus on Larger, Longer term Results

One key component of a network strategy is to focus on achieving high-impact, long-term results.

The assumptions of LCW's theory of change are the following: Civic health depends on civic engagement. If people do not know and understand each other's stories they will not trust each other enough to work together for the common good. When they do trust each other they can quickly solve local problems. (Reinelt & Hoppe 2010)

For Making Connections, the purpose is to "demonstrate that poor results for children and families in tough neighborhoods can be changed for the better." The initiative used a two-pronged approach to achieve that goal: promote economic success for parents, and ensure children get a good start and succeed at school. (AECF website)

Network Outcomes:

The Making Connections initiative generated a wide range of results across the seven geographical areas over the years. For instance, recent results for the Denver area include: (AECF, 2009)

- Nearly 700 residents were placed in health care, construction trade, service sector, and other jobs in 2007–08. About a third of these jobs offered health benefits.
- Since 2005, more than 732 children in the initiative neighborhoods have gained a quality preschool experience.

Lawrence CommunityWorks has over 50,000 members. They have attracted over $50 million in new investments in the community, and are projecting total investments to grow to $90 million by 2011. (Scearce 2009)

Key Challenges

Based on a recent report, some of the most pressing challenges for this work, and for LCW in particular, are related to three main areas: identity, governance and adaptation. Teams have to constantly strike a balance between meeting the interests of members and the network as a whole, acting individually and collectively, and keeping the network stable while also responding to changes and innovations. (Plastrik & Taylor 2004)

In sum, network approaches to place-based leadership are generating innovations and results that are simply not possible with more mainstream, hierarchical approaches. If implemented appropriately, networks can have a reach and longevity that go beyond the time of the investment. It's all about tapping into the inherent talent of a community and facilitating the connections needed to move the community forward. It's that simple and that complex – but experiments like LCW and Making Connections offer a promising glimpse into what may be possible if we work together to catalyze networks across underserved areas in the U.S.

Case Study 2: The Leadership in Action Program

The Leadership in Action (LAP) program sponsored by Annie E. Casey Foundation brings together a diverse group of stakeholders focused on achieving a specific result. The foundation chooses an anchor institution to partner with, a city task force, a citizen group, and a governor's subcommittee. The anchor organization helps to recruit 40 participants who are chosen based on their ability to help make change happen, the resources they can bring to the table, and their positions in key organizations. It's a diverse group from government, non-profits, residents, faith-based community, child advocates, and community leaders who all share a commitment to the well being of kids and families.

This group takes part in nine two-day sessions that occur over a 14 month period. They look at the problems, enlist new partners and begin to identify possible solutions. Between sessions they team to test ideas, put things into action and begin learning about what is working and what it will take to get results.

They are provided with skills in four key areas:

- Results-based accountability – a tool that asks what difference you want to make, what action you will take to achieve it and what progress you are making to that end.

- Leading from the middle – recognizing the influence, resources and authority that leaders can bring to bear on the issues they care about.
- Collaborative leadership – build their relationships and align with resources with other leaders and organizations to have greater impact.
- Race, class and culture dialogue - use data to understand inequities related to class, race and culture, and engage in constructive dialogue and develop strategies for taking on disparities.

The LAP program has had dramatic results in helping groups to gain significant measureable achievement in the results they focus on. This model has a working hypothesis that states:

Population level changes are most likely to occur if a core group of multi-sector, cross agency leaders not only respond to a call to action, but also take aligned actions at scope and scale towards a result.

The theory develops from a set of assumptions about improving community well-being: a) achieving changes at the level of populations cannot be addressed by any single organization/agency and need to be multi-sectoral (both private and public sectors); b) achievement of "outcomes" have proven disappointing because of a lack of alignment on results (i.e. attempting multiple or unidentified specific result); c) breaking through can appear "impossible" (systemic challenges); d) public accountability can increase the sense of urgency and provide motivation to take action/make aligned contribution; e) 'tipping' the scale is possible with a small group who share a common sense of purpose, and have connected with one another and have a shared appreciation for the urgency of the issue being addressed; f) action learning with a sense of urgency as one element for forward movement toward change sought; and g) given the skills and tools, leaders can do the adaptive work required to achieve the results they seek.

It predicts the acceleration of population results when leaders from multiple sectors equipped with specific skills and a sense of heightened urgency:

- *Make an unequivocal commitment to be publicly accountable for a result for a specific population: and,*
- *Work together to take aligned actions to contribute at a scope and scale sufficient to make measurable progress and towards the result.* (Pillsbury 2009)

Participants are trained in the use of Mark Friedman's results-based accountability framework as a tool for forward movement, by: 1) Identification of the result/outcome being sought stated in clear and direct language; 2) Identify an indicator that is the measurement being sought; 3) Develop a strategy that will achieve the result sought. (Annie E. Casey Foundation's Children and Family Fellowship Program, November 2007)

Developing these competencies requires a neutral and supportive environment where leaders can experiment, practice new behaviors and skills, form authentic relationships,

have real conversations and solve conflict in order to support the collaborative work of making aligned contributions.

Case Study 3: Poverty Initiative and the Horizon's Leadership Program

Summary Piece: (excerpted from "Horizons: Community Leadership to Reduce Poverty" produced by NWAF)

Horizons is an 18-month program developed and funded by the Northwest Area Foundation and aimed at improving community leadership systems that generate action to reduce poverty. The program is implemented in small rural and reservation communities with populations of less than 5000 and poverty rates of at least 10 percent. Upon completion of the 18-month program, communities received $10,000 each for implementation of the action plans developed for poverty reduction efforts.

The Horizons pilot (referred to as Horizons I) was implemented in 2003 in 44 communities. One third of the pilot communities were extremely high-poverty Native American reservation communities.

Full implementation of Horizons (referred to as Horizons II) began in 2006 and ended in June 2008. While developed and led by the Northwest Area Foundation, Horizons II was implemented by eight Delivery Organizations (seven University Extension Services and a federally registered Tribal College) that partnered with the Foundation to deliver Horizons in seven states of the Foundation's region. Horizons II began with 163 communities, including 21 reservation communities. Of these, 140 completed the program. A full evaluation of Horizons II is completed.

A second round of Horizons (referred to as Horizons III) began on September 2008 and ended in April 2010. Of the 103 communities that began the Program, 99 completed the program. Horizons III was delivered by the seven University Extension Services. A final evaluation of Horizons III is expected to be completed by August 2010.

Through the implementation of Horizons from 2003 through 2010, over 6000 people were trained through LeadershipPlenty® and over 15,000 people were mobilized to develop community action plans for poverty reduction. LeadershipPlenty®, a program developed by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, is designed to bring a new model of leadership to communities – a model in which leadership emerges organically from community members and which encourages participants to step forward and take leadership roles.

From August 2010 through July 2011, seven Universities Extension Services will work with 255 Horizons I, II, and III communities to build their capacity in asset and prosperity-

building, strengthen civic engagement and introduce public policy advocacy tools, while also seeking additional public and private funds to help communities implement their action plans for poverty reduction.

Lessons from the Horizon's Community Leadership Initiative

This initiative had a number of interesting components that were focused on integrating community engagement and organizational leadership in service of community action plans to reduce poverty.

Basic Program Elements

Study campaigns: The study campaigns engaged thousands of people in conversations about conditions in their communities in an effort to help mobilize people with a new understanding of the impact of poverty in their lives and what to do about it. The study circles organized by Everyday Democracy took place over four months and had an action planning component to them. Communities self-selected to participate after attending a one day workshop to introduce them to the initiative.

Leadership Program: In addition to the study campaigns, each community selected participants for a leadership development program that used the LeadershipPlenty curriculum that was developed by the Pew Charitable Trust to support collaborative leadership in communities.

Community Visioning: NWAF also provided grants of $10,000 to each of the communities that through a visioning process developed a community action plan for reducing poverty.

Community Coaching: The community leadership initiative also made use of community coaches to support communities in the planning, implementation and learning.

Highlight Results

Community Engagement: Close to 8,000 participants were engaged in study circles. Many participants said it was the first time that they had thought about poverty and talked openly about it in their communities. They described building new relationships with neighbors and feeling energized by the process. Communities show a major increase in a range of indicators of civic engagement, including participation in school board meetings, city council, a range of volunteer councils and board service opportunities. People in 35% of the participating communities have run for public office.

Leadership: Over 4,000 participated in leadership programs, 80% of whom did not think of themselves as leaders before participating. They focused on community problem solving, community development and community action. Participants also came away with a very strong view of leadership in community as a collective process.

Community Planning: Close to 40,000 people were engaged in community visioning and planning processes, in many communities close to 25% of the residents. Over

1,800 actions were launched by participating communities. They included job programs, youth programs, community clean up programs, recreation programs, and adult education.

Challenges: There were several areas of challenge that offer some important lessons:

Leadership Curriculum Relevance: The LeadershipPlenty curriculum was not well received in some communities, especially the Native American community who did not resonate with the model of leadership promoted by the program. There were people in other communities who felt the demands of the program were too rigid and not allowing enough for the challenges to people's schedules and ability to meet all of the expectations of them.

Poverty is a Huge Problem to Tackle: It was hard for some communities to understand what a systemic approach to poverty reduction would look like and how it was different than trying to address the effect of poverty in their communities. There was not a clear understanding of who got to decide what an important result was or what a success would be.   There was also concern about the negativity of a poverty approach that defines people by what they do not have as a good mobilizing strategy.

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